

LESSONS FROM A NEAR DIVORCE

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Chapter 1 – Family is A Doorway

When I was younger, I wondered why the Bible didn't say more about family relationships. There are a handful of passages such as those in Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, and 1 Peter 3. Jesus made a few statements here and there. But it seemed meager. We spend more time with family members than anyone else. They are our most consistent source of conflict and of character growth. So why, I thought, was there such a disproportionately small amount of instruction for how to relate to them?

Over time I realized family is actually the most prominent topic in the Bible. However, it is mostly addressed through pictures and metaphors. This is because biological family is not an end in itself. It is a sign that points to something greater. Biological families are a doorway through which we discover God. God's first goal is not that we become a great spouse or parent or child or sibling, but that we become like Him. Therefore, instead of instructing us how to act in these roles, the Bible shows us what God is like in these roles.

Family reveals the kingdom of God. Family reveals heaven. In heaven, the saints are all brothers and sisters and they have one Father. Jesus is the eldest Brother, the firstborn among many brethren (Romans 8:29). Altogether, the saints compose a bride and Jesus is our Husband. Learning to represent God well in our biological families equips us to relate to our eternal families. It's where we learn the culture of the kingdom. It prepares us for heaven and the age to come. It makes us more effective ambassadors during our time on earth.

Walking in God's Shoes

Have you heard the expression you don't really know someone until you've walked a mile in their shoes? God wants us to walk in His shoes. He wants us to stand in His place and experience what He experiences.

We see examples of this in scripture. Abraham sacrificing Isaac represented the Father one day sacrificing Jesus for our sins. Hosea taking an adulterous wife represented Israel committing adultery with false gods. When Ezekiel's wife died, God told him not to mourn, which symbolized God no longer mourning over Israel, since they had completely abandoned Him. In these examples, God asked one of His followers to be an illustration of what He Himself was going through. He asked them to feel a piece of what He was feeling. This is one of the roots of spiritual growth – identifying with God and feeling the weight of His burdens.

Therein lays the most incredible opportunity of family life. The home is where we are most shaped into God's image because it is where we step into roles that most closely mirror His nature and learn to function in them. For example:

- Fathers represent God the Father to their children.
- Mothers represent God's nurturing qualities to their children (ex. Deuteronomy 32:18, Isaiah 49:15, 66:13, Matthew 23:37).
- Husbands represent Christ to their wives (Ephesians 5:23).

- Wives represent the Holy Spirit to their husbands. (Scripture gives both wives and the Holy Spirit a primary title of *helper*. This will be discussed in detail later.)

Many of the most important metaphors scripture gives for how God relates to us are familial. Do you want to grow closer to God and become more like Him? Then become great at the role you are called to that most closely reflects Him. Become great at family.

The best hope the world has of seeing the relationship between Jesus and the church is through godly marriages. The best chance the world has of seeing how God relates to His children is through godly parents. When we pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, we are essentially praying for the establishment of an eternal family.

About This Book

This is the first book in a two-book series. It covers marriage and sexuality. The second book, *Lessons from a Fractured Family*, covers parenthood and intergenerational relationships. I occasionally tell stories to illustrate concepts. Stories from my own life are true. However, with stories about other people, some details have been changed.

Much of what I wrote in these books I learned through my mistakes. For several years, I badly mistreated my wife, rejected counsel from my parents, in-laws, pastors, and friends, and nearly destroyed my marriage. I discuss bits and pieces of my testimony throughout. After I repented, through scripture, the Lord began showing me how He views my marriage, my children, my parents, and other spiritual influencers in my life. He taught me how the enemy attacks these relationships and how to overcome him. He taught me principles for how to protect and nurture them.

In addition, the books address a number of topics not directly connected to my personal journey, but are nevertheless related to the overall themes of marriage and family. I occasionally make generalizations about men or women. As with any generalization, in the real world there are exceptions. I encourage you to receive any statement that is helpful and applicable to you.

All scripture quotations are from the NASB version unless otherwise stated. This is an important point because many of the passages I quote or cite are worded quite differently in other versions, sometimes even saying the opposite of what the NASB states. Therefore, when checking any quotations or citations for accuracy, I strongly recommend using a literal word-for-word translation such as the NASB, NKJV, KJV, or YLT rather than popular thought-for-thought translations, or interpretations, which leave far more room for translators to insert their own views and doctrines into the text.

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work with a donation through my website. Regardless of whether you donate, thank you sincerely for taking the time to read my work.

Next

In the next chapter, we'll take a look at God's design for marriage from the beginning of creation and how His design was distorted by the fall.

Chapter 2 – God’s Design for Marriage

In general, God created men to be more accomplishment-oriented and women to be more relationship-oriented. This is why Adam’s primary commission from God was in the area of labor and accomplishment – cultivating and keeping the garden (Genesis 2:15). Eve’s primary commission was in the area of relationships – serving as a helper to her husband (Genesis 2:18).

Correspondingly, when mankind fell to sin, Adam and Eve’s curses were also related to labor and relationships. For Adam, the ground was cursed so his labor would become toilsome. For Eve, God multiplied her pain in childbirth and warned her about the effect of sin on her marriage (Genesis 3:16-19).

Of course, men also have a relational side and women also esteem labor and accomplishments. This speaks of their primary orientation, not their only orientation. Men’s and women’s qualities together fully reflect God’s image, which is why they were both created in His image (Genesis 1:27) and commissioned jointly to rule over the earth (Genesis 1:28).

Adam’s Labor

Before the fall, both the environment and Adam’s mental and physical abilities were flawless. His labor would have been unimaginably fulfilling, marked by fluid creativity and innovation. Over time, he would have experienced success after success, his influence always expanding, like a career path that goes from one plateau to another. As the population grew, all people would have used their unique gifts and abilities and labored harmoniously alongside one another. Adam and his descendants would have built homes, cities, technologies, and governing / organizational structures completely devoid of sinful influence. There would have been an abundance of every kind of valuable good and service. No one would have worried about how to survive. The earth would have been far beyond any conception of utopia fallen mankind has contrived.

After the fall, Adam’s labor became a frustrating struggle. He faced opposition from the environment and diminished mental and physical abilities. He faced setbacks, injuries, and confusing problems with no solution. As the population grew, people frequently worked against one another, vying for position, ruled by selfish motives. Leaders enslaved and dominated others. People toiled to make ends meet and worried about the future. There was poverty, starvation, and violent conflicts over valuable resources.

Eve’s Relationships

Without sin, Eve’s relationships with her husband, children, and others would have been completely pure. She would have given herself to her husband unreservedly. She would have been delighted to help him because she knew he always had her best interests at heart. She would never have questioned his motives or worried he might try to dominate her. She would

never have felt jealous because she knew his romantic desire was for her alone. She would have felt no compulsion to control him because she knew he perfectly relied on God's grace to lead their family. She would have freely poured out love and wisdom into her children. She would have watched her beautiful legacy expand to grandchildren, great grandchildren, and on and on. Her family line would have been forever devoid of pain, fear, or grief.

After the fall, Adam and Eve's marriage was distorted by sin. Pain and distrust crept in. Just as God warned (Genesis 3:16), Eve was prone to idolizing Adam, looking more to him for her sense of value and security than to God. This caused her to often feel jealous and insecure. Also, as God warned, Adam was prone to ruling over Eve from selfish motives (Genesis 3:16). This caused her to become fearful about how he led their family. She also experienced multiplied pain in childbirth, which paralleled the pain she experienced in their spiritual development. She saw her children rebel, hurt one another, develop addictions, and cause her heavy grief.

Society's Values

Today in the west many women relate more to career ambition than dreams of marriage and family. However, this may be due in part to the fact that our society greatly affirms career / monetary success and dismisses traditional, domestic life as insignificant. Women are often made to feel as though they're settling or missing out if they devote a large portion of their lives to raising children. The desire for society's affirmation has reshaped many women's values and curbed their domestic instincts. This is part of the enemy's strategy to erode our esteem for the family.

Motherhood

If someone said to me, *"Women are just as competent and qualified as men for the most important jobs in society, so why should they be the ones to stay home and raise children?"* I would say, *"You just answered your own question."* The bigger problem in our society is not inequality in the workplace, but the eviction of motherhood from its rightful place of honor.

I fully support equality in the workplace. My mother was police officer and a therapist during different seasons of my upbringing. My wife is an excellent therapist. In my professional life, some of the best managers I've reported to were women. I don't deny that women often aren't compensated for the value they provide in the marketplace in the same way as their male colleagues. Nor do I deny that this inequality is wrong, detrimental to society, and should be pointed out in public discourse by corporate and media influencers.

But the idea that a woman who chooses to be a stay-at-home mom is somehow missing out or settling for less is a ridiculous notion. When exactly did raising the next generation, sacrificially teaching them integrity and kindness and wisdom and work ethic day in and day out come to be considered less important than the labor of doctors or lawyers or accountants? How is caring for people's bodies or companies or money more important than the formation of their souls? It's not less important – it's *more* important.

Motherhood is the ultimate act of service, the greatest sacrifice, and the most pressing need. Women are indeed just as competent and qualified for the most important jobs in society. In some ways they are more qualified, as we'll discuss in coming chapters. This is why those who choose the most important job of all – staying home to raise children – should be held in the highest esteem.

Social Media and Rest Home Talk

Two illustrations come to my mind when I think about the aforementioned male-female differences. First, I frequently check current events on my phone. My wife Jenny, on the other hand, regularly checks social media updates. One day I turned to her and said, *"You know, you and I both like to check the news – only you prefer news about your family and friends, while I prefer news about what's happening in the world. But they're both just news."* She smiled and agreed, adding that this was probably a common difference between men and women.

Second, my dad recently spent time with his mom in her rest home. Afterward he observed to me, *"All the men talk about is their health problems and all the women talk about is their grandchildren."* I pondered this later and thought, *"How appropriate."* Men pride themselves in being strong and capable. Somewhere deep down it feels wrong that our bodies incrementally break down and die – like it's not supposed to be this way. Likewise, women take pride in their seeing their families grow from one generation to the next. It feels wrong that their participation in them must come to an abrupt end.

The Purpose of the Curses

Why was the ground cursed for Adam? Why did God give Eve pain in childbirth? Because of sin, our greatest gifts can become our greatest idols. We look to our gifts for our sense of purpose and identity more than we look to God. This is why men make idols out of their careers and women make idols out of their families. This reinforces our lost condition and intensifies our trajectory toward eternal separation.

Gifts make us proud and secure, but pain is humbling. After the fall, men and women experienced pain in the areas in which they were most prone to take pride or find false security. The curses hindered our ability to find our identities in idols. They help us recognize the futility of life apart from God.

God Did Not Curse Adam and Eve's Marriage

It is important to point out that the breakdown in Adam and Eve's marriage was not God's doing. It was simply a natural consequence of sin entering the world. Notice what God said in Genesis 3:16: **"I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you will bring forth children; yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."**

With the first part of the verse, the part about pain in childbirth, God took responsibility. *“I am the One doing this,”* He said. *“Multiplied pain in childbirth is from Me.”* This was not the case with the second part. God did not say, *“I will make you desire (idolize) your husband”* or *“I will cause your husband to rule over (dominate) you.”* He only said it was going to happen. In other words, God was telling Eve what effects sin would have on their marriage.

The Need for Humility

Whenever two people or groups relate to one another, the only way for them to receive the full blessing that God wants to impart is for both to exercise humility. This is especially true when men and women relate to one another.

Men and women have profoundly different gifts, but they correspond to profoundly different weaknesses. Therefore, we should give grace to one another to have completely different struggles without condemning each other. Criticism is deadly. It is part of our sin nature to accusingly point out someone else’s struggle just because we don’t struggle with the same thing ourselves.

Here are a few examples of different gift-struggle combinations we can give each other grace for:

- Most women do not fully understand the power of a man’s sexual desire and how Satan distorts it into lust.
- Most men do not fully understand the depth of a woman’s longing to be desirable and beautiful and how Satan distorts it into vanity, self-criticism, or envy of other women they perceive to be more attractive.
- Most women do not fully appreciate the power of a man’s drive to be successful – to do something significant that impacts the world – and how Satan twists it into selfish ambition, pride, and idolatry.
- Most men do not fully understand the depth of a woman’s need to feel safe and secure in her relationships and how Satan twists it into controlling or idolizing family members or friends.

Men and women can be strong where their spouses are weak. We can give grace and cover each other’s sin. Humility does not mean refraining from confronting sin. But it does mean recognizing we are not in their shoes and don’t fully know how difficult their struggle is. It means exercising patience and gentleness with their growth process.

My Critical Attitude

Early in our marriage I felt critical of Jenny because I thought she was too attached to her parents and siblings. I saw it as a sign of immaturity and a lack of surrender to God. I feared it would stand in the way of us moving away if God should lead us to do so. It took me many years to understand that Jenny's intense love and loyalty for family was how God made her.

It also took me many years to realize my concern about Jenny's "lack of surrender" was not at all for Jenny's sake. I just didn't want anything to get in the way of what God might have in store for me. I was only concerned about my gifts, my dreams, and my calling – it was all about *me!*

In addition to being selfishly motivated, my criticism was just wrong. A couple years later, Jenny agreed to move with me across the country, away from everyone she knew and loved, for no other reason than because she felt God wanted her to.

Appreciating Our Differences

Now I have discovered that one key to not condemning another's struggle is to intentionally appreciate the corresponding gift. Men and women can be amazed at each other because God made us so wonderfully different. Now when I observe the depth of emotion that comes up in my wife's heart towards the people she loves, I am amazed. I see how much joy it gives her when they are happy. I see how much grief she feels when they are in pain. Watching her causes me to feel a small part of what she feels. It amazes me to think her emotions are just a tiny glimpse of the emotions God feels.

Next

Is there an authority structure in marriage? If so, what is it and why did God design marriage this way? In the next chapter, we'll address these questions.

Chapter 3 – Marriage and Authority

Men and women have different functions in marriage. Difference in function does not mean difference in value. Husbands and wives are equally loved by God. However, they are not equal in authority or accountability. Ephesians 5:22-25 says:

“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her...”

Why did God design marriage this way? This question could be broken down into four sub-questions:

1. Why does God entrust authority?
2. What does it mean to have authority?
3. What does submission mean?
4. How does this design help men and women become who they are called to be?

Let's briefly look at each of these questions.

Why Does God Entrust Authority?

All authority in the universe can be traced back to God as the Originator. Throughout the Bible we see God's desire to distribute His authority to others. Here are some of the different spheres of authority God has established:

- Human beings over their own choices (ex. Deuteronomy 30:19)
- Parents over children (Ephesians 6:1)
- Husbands over wives (Ephesians 5:22)
- Civil authorities over civilians (Romans 13:1)
- Church leaders over believers (ex. 2 Corinthians 13:10, 1 Peter 5:2)
- Employers over employees (ex. Colossians 3:22)
- Owners/managers over private organizations (ex. 1 Peter 2:13)
- Mankind over the earth and the animal kingdom (Genesis 1:28)
- Higher-ranking angels over other angels (ex. Daniel 10:13)
- Angels over their own choices (ex. Ezekiel 28:14-15)

Learning to steward authority is one of the primary ways free-will beings mature in godly character. If God wanted everything to go perfectly smoothly, with no mistakes and no potential for sin, He would control everything and everyone. He would exercise all authority by

Himself. But He has no interest in this; this is actually the opposite of His nature. This would stunt our growth and deprive us of the opportunity to become more like Him.

A kingdom like that would be tyranny, not freedom. This is how Satan runs his kingdom. God, by contrast, is not controlling. He helps people form godly character by *choice*, not by compulsion. He waits to be invited, not forcing Himself on us. He is the ultimate respecter of freewill, because freewill is at the heart of what it means to be created in His image. Yes, free will is messy. There would be no sin without it. But there could also be no genuine love or worship.

What Does It Mean to Have Authority?

Having authority means different things in different contexts. For example, church leaders have authority to *teach, comfort, or rebuke* in a church context. Civil rulers have authority to *punish evil* if it violates someone's life or liberty or property. Parents have authority to *teach and discipline* children. However, the type of authority given to husbands is to *love, serve, protect, provide, and lead by example*.

Some have interpreted Ephesians 5:22-25 to mean that husbands can give their wives commands since Jesus gives commands to the church. However, scripture uses *many* metaphors for how Jesus relates to His people. For example, He is a Master, a Judge, a King, a Creator, a Shepherd, a Father, and a Friend. Whenever scripture portrays Jesus as giving commands, it is typically as a Master, a King, or a Creator. By contrast, when scripture portrays Jesus as a Husband, He is shown loving, serving, protecting, providing, and leading by example, not giving orders. This will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter.

Part of the reason my marriage broke down is because I believed I should have the final say in every major decision. I didn't envision any scenario in which I should yield to Jenny's preference or counsel if I had sincerely sought the Lord and felt directed by Him. However, during my restoration, I discovered that scripture actually teaches the opposite. Now I see her as a partner and wise counselor, often providing discernment and insights I never thought of. This has brought us much closer together and has vastly improved the marriage-model we present to our children.

What Does Submission Mean?

Biblical submission could be defined like this:

Submission is a heart-attitude that honors authority, obeys its legitimate commands, forgives its misuses, and respectfully declines commands that are outside of its jurisdiction to give.

The first part – the part about giving honor and obeying legitimate commands protects the heart against the sin of rebellion. The second part – the part about forgiving misuses and

respectfully disobeying illegitimate commands – protects the heart against the sin of unforgiveness. Put them together and you have an impenetrable force-field around the one thing in life that matters most – our relationship with God. No matter how unjust or oppressive of an authority a person finds himself under, submission will render that authority powerless to harden a person's heart toward God.

God's command for submission is meant for our protection. It is not oppressive, but freeing. Submission is not weakness. In fact, it is the most powerful action a person can take in response to oppressive leadership because it invites the power of God into the situation.

How does this design help men and women become who they are called to be?

In general, a man values *respect* and *success*. He instinctively understands hierarchies (such as in companies, ministries, or governments) and where he fits into them. He wants to build something significant and rule over a domain. He wants to impact the world around him.

However, he is called to do this with kindness and selfless motives. When he builds an organization, his goal must be to serve others, not exalt himself. When he rules over others, he must value the people more than his position. Learning how to lead and cover a relational wife trains him how to do this. It is how he forms God's character and becomes who he was created to be.

In general, a woman desires *love* and *security*. She understands relationships and wants to feel close and connected to others. She wants to be seen as valuable, beautiful, and worthy of being pursued. However, she is also called to fill a position in God's kingdom, both in this age and in the next. God's kingdom is built upon order and hierarchy. There will always be things to build and accomplish and rule over. Learning how to show respect for a husband and submit to his leadership trains her for this.

God thinks long-term in His dealings with us. This 70 to 80 year life is very short compared to the 1000 years in which we will help Him rule over the earth in the next age and shorter still compared to the ages beyond that. This life is largely about training and preparation for our eternal positions. The choices we make and the characters we develop now will be with us for eternity. God gave us headship and submission in marriage because it was the best possible way to mold us into the image-bearers we were intended to become.

Have you noticed in Ephesians 5 that husbands and wives are both commanded to do the opposite of what comes naturally to them? Respect comes naturally to men, but they are commanded to love (vs. 25). Love comes naturally to women, but they are commanded to show respect (vs. 33). This is how God transforms us. True obedience is not doing something because it comes naturally, but because we want to please God.

Was There Headship Before the Fall?

Some people have taught that Adam and Eve had equal authority in their marriage before the fall. They reason, since there was no sin, there was no need for authority. However, God's pattern of delegating authority in scripture does not depend on the presence of sin. In fact, the New Testament highlights four aspects of Adam and Eve's creation *before* the fall that symbolize God's design for headship and submission in marriage:

- 1) The order in which they were created (1 Timothy 2:13)
- 2) Eve being taken out of Adam's own body (1 Corinthians 11:8).
- 3) Eve's hair symbolizing a covering (1 Corinthians 11:15).
- 4) Eve's calling as Adam's helper (1 Corinthians 11:9).

Do you remember what we discussed concerning Genesis 3:16? God was not cursing Eve by subjecting her to Adam's headship. He was merely telling her what would result from Adam's headship being distorted by sin.

In God's kingdom, being under authority is a blessing, not a curse. Jesus defined godly authority as sacrificially serving others (Mathew 20:25-27). We as the church do not resent being subject to Jesus' headship; this is the same kind of covering Adam was meant to be for Eve.

Next

Why did mankind fall into sin? Did it have anything to do with a breakdown in Adam and Eve's marriage? This is the topic of the next chapter.

Chapter 4 – A Contributing Cause of the Fall

The fall of mankind was due, in part, to a failure by both Adam and Eve to abide in their marital roles. The test they failed in the garden was partly a test of headship and submission.

In Genesis 2:16-17, we see that God spoke only to Adam, not to Eve, not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. This is reiterated in Genesis 3:11. This is because Adam had the responsibility as Eve's covering to share what God had spoken and lead by example.

We are not specifically told how Eve became aware of God's command concerning the Tree of Knowledge. However, it's unlikely that she heard it straight from God's mouth like Adam did for three reasons.

First, she was not held equally accountable with Adam. When God confronted Adam and Eve after eating the fruit, He initially spoke only to Adam even though Eve was the initiator. God did not even address Eve until Adam brought her into the discussion by blaming on her. If Eve had heard the same thing directly from God, would she not have been equally accountable, or even more accountable as the initiator? The apostle Paul also placed the responsibility for the fall on Adam, saying, **"For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive."** (1 Corinthians 15: 20-22)

Second, Satan targeted Eve rather than Adam for deception. This was strategic. He likely chose Eve because she was more vulnerable to deception, having not heard the command directly from God for herself, but only through her husband. Perhaps this is why scripture says that Eve was deceived (1 Timothy 2:14), but Adam was not, even though they were both present and both heard the same thing from Satan.

Finally, Eve did not accurately recount what God said. When Satan asked her about God's command, she replied, **"...God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'"** (Genesis 3:3) God never said anything about not touching it. Some teachers say Eve presumptuously added her own words to God's command. This may be true. However, it just as well could have been a failure on Adam's part to properly communicate God's command to her.

Once Satan deceived Eve into believing God was withholding something good from them, she had a choice to make. Her husband, her spiritual leader and protector, was right there with her. She felt she knew what was best – eating the fruit and becoming wise. She sincerely felt the serpent was trustworthy. But she also knew she was under her husband's covering. Therefore, it would be wise for her to consult with Adam and consider letting him take the lead in this important decision. Also, since they regularly walked with God, they both should have waited until the next time they saw Him to talk about the serpent's allegations.

Unwilling to put the outcome at risk, Eve decided to take matters into her own hands. If she put the decision in Adam's hands, he might mess it up. Without discussion, she took the fruit,

ate it, and then gave it to her husband. By her unwillingness to abide under the protective covering of her husband's authority, she subjected herself and every wife since to a distorted, oppressive version of that same authority.

Adam did not do any better. He stood silently by and watched as his wife was lied to by the serpent and then obeyed him. There was no deception in Adam's heart. He knew God's words were trustworthy. He knew eating the fruit would lead to death. He also knew he had a responsibility to lead and protect Eve. Instead he stood passively by while she led them both into rebellion. What a tragedy!

Adam failed to exercise his God-given headship over a pure, sinless wife, whose natural bent was to unreservedly trust him. By his failure, Adam positioned himself and every husband since to lead wives who would be continually subject to fears, doubts, and resistance toward their leadership.

Understanding how the breakdown of headship and submission contributed to the fall is important because Satan sometimes attacks marriages in the same way today. And God sometimes allows us to be tested in this same way.

Did any content from the last two chapters feel uncomfortable to you? Or even offensive? If so, I encourage you to keep reading. In future chapters, we'll talk in more about authority, submission, and how to make decisions as a couple. You may be surprised by what we uncover.

Next

Can women have authority? What kinds of roles are women called to in God's kingdom? Why is Satan threatened by women? We'll look at these questions in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 – Women and Authority

In God's kingdom, sometimes the reason we are given authority is so we will serve those under us in such a way that they will go on to make a greater impact than us. Jesus did this for His bride. Consider three verses:

- Jesus said in John 16:7: **"...it is to your advantage that I go away..."**
- Jesus said in John 14:12: **"he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do".**
- Jesus said in John 12:24: **"...unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit"** (which meant the fruit of His ministry would increase if He laid down His life and sent His bride out in His place).

These verses do not mean that anyone beside Jesus has ever been or will ever be sinless or the Savior. But they do mean that God's purposes were more effectively advanced through the empowerment of Jesus' bride rather than by Him doing everything on His own.

Paul made an unbelievable statement in Philippians 2:3-7: **"...with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves... Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus."** Jesus – the most important Person who ever lived, the Savior of the world, the focal point of human history – considered others more important than Himself. How is this possible? Was He deceived? Was He just pretending or being falsely humble? No, He really believed it. He really expected others, who corporately composed His wife, to become more important than Him in the area that matters most – the advancement of God's kingdom. On His own, He could only construct a cornerstone. But through His bride, He could construct an entire temple (see Ephesian 2:19-22, 1 Corinthians 3:11, and 1 Peter 2:4-5).

In the same way, sometimes husbands are given authority to protect, serve, and lead their wives so they will go on to make a greater impact than them. If this is true, why are we not more used to seeing this in the body of Christ? I have three thoughts on this:

- 1) Throughout history, Satan has set up various systems to suppress women's spiritual influence and block marriages from fulfilling this pattern.
- 2) This pattern may be becoming more common presently compared to many previous generations in history.
- 3) Greater impact does not necessarily mean greater visibility. This pattern may be seen more clearly from heaven when we are able to view church history from God's perspective. It may also be reflected in the positions the saints are assigned to fill in the age to come.

Let's briefly discuss each of these points.

1. Satan Has Set up Systems to Suppress Women's Spiritual Influence

Throughout history, Satan has carefully set up both *cultural* and *religious* systems that diminish women's influence. In some cultures, women have been treated like property or sex objects rather than human beings. They have been regarded as having no intellect or trustworthiness. They have been forbidden from filling leadership roles. Their testimonies have been inadmissible in legal disputes.

In some religious systems, women have been barred from spiritual leadership and male leaders have been either forbidden to marry or encouraged to have multiple wives. Both of these limit the potential for husband-wife partnerships to impact the world in the way God intended.

Satan knows the church will overlook some of the most important aspects of its identity and of God's nature without women being given prominence. How can the church understand its identity as the bride of Christ without the influence wives, since they embody this metaphor? Or how can the church understand the nurturing, compassionate side of God (ex. Isaiah 66:13) without the influence of godly mothers?

2. Women's Spiritual Influence May Be Increasing Today Compared to Previous Generations

Even in the church age, women have still been mostly disallowed from expressing their ministry gifts due to cultural norms. However, today it is becoming common for women to teach, preach, write, and hold various other positions of influence in the body of Christ. Beside them, we frequently see proud husbands lifting them up, supporting them, and encouraging them. What an incredible picture of Jesus and the church. The co-laboring partnership God created husbands and wives to function in is less hindered by unbiblical traditions today than in many past generations.

Some have interpreted 1 Timothy 2:12 (NASB), in which Paul says, **"But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man..."** to mean that women should not teach or hold positions of authority in the church. However, this is a mistranslation. The Greek word that is often interpreted **"man"** in this passage is the same word that is interpreted **"husband"** in Ephesians 5:22. The word can be translated either way depending on the context. Since the next two verses discuss Adam and Eve, the first marriage, and the rearing of children, the clear context is marriage and family rather than church structure. The verse should say that a woman should not exercise authority over her **"husband"**, which is how Young's Literal Translation and some other translations translate it. This translation is consistent with the rest of scripture.

Women are shown teaching, prophesying, or exercising authority many places in scripture. For example, Aaron's sister Miriam (Ex 15:20), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), Anna (Luke 2:36), and the four daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9) are all called prophetesses. Paul permitted women to

prophecy in church (1 Corinthians 11:5). Debra was a political and military leader in Israel (Judges 4). Phoebe was a deacon (Romans 16:1). And Junia was an apostle (Romans 16:7).

Furthermore, God chose a woman to be the first witness of His resurrection (John 20:14) and He chose a woman to become the first European convert (Acts 16:14). Also, from the very beginning of scripture (Genesis 1:28), God gave both men and women authority to rule over the earth. And at the end of scripture (ex. Revelation 20:4), there is no differentiation between men and women when redeemed saints are given authority of over the earth.

What About 1 Corinthians 14:34-35?

1 Corinthians 14:34-35 says:

“The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.”

At first glance this passage appears to corroborate the mistranslated version of 1 Timothy 2:12. However, the clear context is keeping order while practicing the gift of prophecy (see 1 Corinthians 14:31-33, 39-40). Therefore, one might conclude it has a narrower application that only requires silence from women during portions of a service devoted to prophecy. But even this application is too broad since Paul explicitly stated women *can* prophecy in church only a little earlier in the same letter (1 Corinthians 11:5), as long as it is done in proper order and while abiding under an appropriate spiritual covering.

I am wary of re-interpreting passages in light of historical context; sometimes this technique is used to dismiss what the passage plainly says. However, since Paul already stated that women can indeed prophecy in church, and since we have so many aforementioned examples of women occupying the offices of prophet, apostle, deacon, and other positions of authority, in this case the historical context may well be valuable. As it turns out, many theologians believe women in particular were contributing to an atmosphere of chaos in the Corinthian church by speaking out of turn during the practice of spiritual gifts. This would perfectly explain Corinthians 14:34-35's contextual placement and its apparent contradiction with Paul's earlier statement. Also, the Greek word used for **“women”** can be translated **“wives”** and perhaps it should be since verse 35 presumes all the women being addressed have husbands.

In summary, Corinthians 14:34-35 does not corroborate a mistranslation of 1 Timothy 2:12 or invalidate 1 Corinthians 11:5. Rather, when translated correctly, the three passages harmonize well together. They honor a woman's legitimate role in ministry settings while also keeping order and abiding under appropriate spiritual authority structures.

3. Greater Impact Does Not Necessarily Mean Greater Visibility

In a fallen world, strength is superior to weakness, authority is domineering, and power supersedes relationships. All of this devalues women and femininity. However, each of these trends is the opposite of God's perspective. Therefore, the true value of women's contributions to history will be understood much differently from heaven and in the age to come.

Let's take a moment to consider some truths from scripture about women that are not typically recognized or appreciated in this age.

Women and Weakness

1 Peter 3:7 says, **"You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman..."** This passage can feel insulting to some women because it highlights how women, in general, are physically weaker and emotionally tenderer than men. However, is this actually a negative statement? God's kingdom works oppositely to how the world works. What does the Bible say about weakness? Consider 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 or Corinthians 1:27:

"And [Jesus] has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' ...therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses... for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

"...God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong."

So to summarize:

- God's power is perfected in weakness.
- When we boast about our weaknesses, the power of Christ can dwell in us.
- When we are weak, then we are strong.
- God uses the weak to shame the strong.
- Women are weaker than men.

When I first put these verses together, I started to feel envious of women! So much of the power that is available to us as believers comes from embracing a position of weakness and dependence on God. Paradoxically, women are uniquely qualified to carry the power of God because they are inherently weaker. They can potentially be entrusted with more authority because they will more naturally acknowledge their dependence on Him.

Several years ago I listened to a message by a woman who leads a discipleship ministry. Her message was perplexing. She spoke with such softness and gentleness, but her words seemed to carry so much *power*; so much weight and conviction! Many others said the same thing. It reminded of what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:3-5:

“I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but of the power of God.”

My wife Jenny once ministered to a woman who was struggling with shame. Jenny asked the woman to say out loud the things she thought God wanted to say to her. However, the woman felt too much shame to participate, so Jenny said, “Ok, I’ll say it.” As soon as Jenny said this, she felt tears welling up. The room suddenly felt as though God was right there with them. Jenny fought back the tears to tell the girl how deeply God loved her, how wonderful His plan for her life was, and how His view of her was totally separate from the shame she felt. By the end, they were both in tears. This woman had grown up in the church and had heard all these things before, but this time was different. The message she heard in that moment was in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power of God.

Women are a Higher Order of Creation

There is a sense in which women are a higher order of creation than men. When God began to create living things in the Genesis account, each life form was progressively more complex and beautiful than the last. Each new level of creation had a greater capacity to reflect the Creator. This pattern continued in the creation of mankind. Eve being created last means she was the culmination, or highest part, of all that God created. However, the fact that He created her out of Adam’s own body showed that she needed her husband to fulfill her potential. Consider the following three logic steps:

Step 1: Men, in general, typify the *strength* of God and the *building, accomplishing* nature of God.

Step 2: Women, in general, typify the *beauty* of God and the *relational* nature of God.

Step 3: If there were no beauty, there would be nothing worth protecting. The reason strength exists is to protect and serve that which is beautiful. Likewise, if there were no relationships, building and accomplishing would be empty and meaningless. The fundamentally reason we build societies and is so that relationships (families, communities, churches) can exist and thrive.

In other words, the *strength* of God exists to protect and serve the *beauty* of God. The *building* nature of God exists to protect and serve the *relational* nature of God. I’ve occasionally heard Christian leaders say there is no greater joy in the universe than gazing upon the beauty of God. It’s not an accident that they choose *beauty* as His attribute that is most worthy of marveling at. All of God’s attributes are worthy of worship, but there is something truly special about His beauty. King David clearly agreed with this sentiment. In considering what He would ask of God if he could make only one request, he said in Psalms 27:4, **“One thing I have asked from the**

LORD, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD."

Women, Authority, and Wisdom

Relationships are the most valuable things in the universe. Women possess an innate appreciation for this truth since they are more relational by nature. This equips them to be entrusted with enormous amounts of spiritual authority if they also learn to assimilate the godly pursuits that come more naturally to men, such as building, protecting, and respect for hierarchy.

Stewarding authority has a lot to do with wisdom. There seems to be a special connection in the Bible between women and wisdom. It was the desire for wisdom, pursued in a forbidden way, which caused Eve to disobey in the garden (Genesis 3:6). Also, in the book of Proverbs, a book all about wisdom, wisdom is personified as a woman (chapters 3-4, 8-9) and it culminates with a woman (chapter 31).

In the book of Esther, King Ahasuerus could choose from among the most beautiful women in the world to be his queen. However, he sensed something about Esther that was different from all other women (Esther 2:17). He did not realize it, but what drew him to her was the grace and favor of God on her life. When he offered Esther dominion over half of his kingdom (Esther 5:3), he was probably not abdicating his responsibility as king, nor was he unconcerned about condition of his empire. On the contrary, he likely trusted her wisdom to rule so much that he knew the kingdom would prosper under her authority.

On a practical note, it is important to recognize that marriage is the only context where headship and submission applies. The Bible does not say that every man is the head of every woman. A woman can be a pastor, a president, or a CEO. She can have authority over countless people. The only thing a woman can never be is the head of her husband.

Leadership that bears spiritual fruit requires grace from God. Therefore, it doesn't matter how gifted or talented of a leader a woman is; she still does not have grace to be the head of her husband. Nor does it matter how much her husband prefers to follow; he *does* have grace to be the head if he chooses to believe God for it.

If a woman stewards authority over other people, like a CEO or a pastor does, it does not mean she is answerable to her husband for how she operates in those roles. He can counsel her and pray for her, but the authority is hers, not his. A husband's position as the head only gives him authority in the area of their marriage and family. There may be some overlap between her family life and her other roles, but God can give couples wisdom to navigate through unclear areas when they ask Him for it. Headship and submission looks a little bit different in every marriage. God gives grace for each couple to apply His word to their unique relationship, personalities, and circumstances.

Heralding the Second Coming; Replacing the Kings of the Earth

Regarding influence in the age to come and in the days leading up to it, consider an incredible statement David made in Psalm 68. The chapter contains several elements related to the second coming – Jesus Christ riding on a horse leading heavenly armies; a great earthquake; all the wicked melting like wax and perishing; Christ taking His throne in Israel forever (vs. 1-3, 7-8, 16-17). All of this imagery parallels passages in Revelation and other parts of scripture that describe the Battle of Armageddon and the second coming. But notice what it says in verse 11. Who does it say will proclaim the good news of the second coming? Who does it say will replace the wicked kings of the earth in their positions of authority? **“The women who proclaim the good tidings are a great host; kings of armies flee, they flee, and she who remains at home will divide the spoil!”** Evidently, women, wives, and faithful mothers will be at the forefront of proclaiming Christ’s return and among those given authority in His kingdom.

Conclusion

Although men are more accomplishment-oriented, women, in a sense, are uniquely equipped for leadership since they are naturally more relational and relationship is the highest value of God’s kingdom. Plus, women are **“weaker”** (1 Peter 3:7) and God’s **“power is perfected in weakness”** (2 Corinthians 12:9). However, women were also created to be covered, served, and empowered by their husbands in order realize their full potential. This ingredient has been missing from many marriages and in many generations, but when it is present it paints a special picture of the partnership between Christ and the church.

Next

What exactly does God have in mind for believers in the next age and how does marriage prepare us for it? The next chapter is devoted to this topic.

Chapter 6 – The Age to Come

Have you ever thought about what it will be like to stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ? Have you thought about what you will be doing in the decades and centuries after the Second Coming?

After reading the last chapter, my wife Jenny suggested I spend some time explaining the relationship between marriage and the age to come. As a reminder, here are some of the statements I made:

- God's purpose for headship and submission is, in part, to prepare us for our roles in the age to come.
- The characters we form now will be with us forever.
- The idea of husbands helping wives go on to have a greater impact may be reflected in the positions we are assigned to fill in the age to come.
- Women will evidently be among those given authority in the age to come.

Each of these statements has to do with *eternal rewards*. I've attended church for many years, spanning dozens of denominations, but have not heard many messages about this topic.

Many Christians have been taught that God erasing or forgetting our sins (ex. Psalms 103:12, Isaiah 43:25, Jeremiah 31:34) means we will not be subject to judgment. Many have also been taught that everyone will be the same in heaven or the age to come. Neither of these is true. The fact is, even if we are saved, our eternities are still deeply affected by our choices in this life. In this chapter I will show five truths from scripture:

1) *The Judgment Seat of Christ*

Every believer will stand before Judgment Seat of Christ and recompensed for his or her choices in this life.

2) *Authority over the Earth*

In the age to come, resurrected saints will rule over the earth.

3) *Varying Rewards and Degrees of Authority*

Resurrected saints will be assigned varying degrees of authority and responsibility, according to their faithfulness in this life. This is part of what the Bible calls eternal rewards.

4) *The Great Turnaround*

This assignment of rewards, authority, and responsibility will be the greatest turnaround of all time. Many who are considered the greatest in this age will either be lost or the least and many who are the least in this age will be the greatest.

5) *Treasure in Heaven*

Every believer can also store up treasure in heaven. This is another part of what the Bible calls eternal rewards.

Supporting Passages

Now let's briefly step through some scriptures that teach these points.

The Judgment Seat of Christ

Romans 14:10, 1 Corinthians 3:13-15, 4:5, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Ecclesiastes 12:14, Revelation 22:12, and Matthew 12:36, collectively, teach that God will recompense believers for every good deed and every evil deed we ever committed throughout our entire lives, including the motives of our hearts and every word that came out of our mouths.

Authority over the Earth

Revelation 2:26, 20:4 and Daniel 7:27 explicitly state that the saints will rule over the earth in the next age. Jesus likewise said in Matthew 5:5 the saints will **"inherit the earth"**. (Most if the not all of the beatitudes have their ultimate fulfillment at the Judgment Seat of Christ and in the ages to come.) Also, Revelation 11:17-18 connects the timing of the saints receiving their rewards with Jesus beginning to reign over the earth.

Varying Rewards and Degrees of Authority

1 Corinthians 3:13-15 discusses two possible outcomes (really two ends of a continuum) for believers – being rewarded for one's spiritual labors, or suffering loss and receiving no reward in spite of being saved. Also, Luke 19:15-26 depicts Jesus assigning believers varying degrees of authority at His second coming, according to their faithfulness in this life. Finally, when James and John asked for high positions in Matthew 20:21-27, Jesus acknowledged such positions existed (although they were not His to give) and then explained what criteria will be used to populate them (self-sacrifice, servanthood).

The Great Turnaround

In Luke 14:7-11, a parable about the wedding supper of the lamb, which takes place at the second coming, Jesus described a remarkable scene in which guests were seated according to varying degrees of honor. He then concluded by saying, **"everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted"**.

Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 19:28-30 that **“many who are first will be last, the last, first”**. The clear context of this statement is positions of authority in the millennial kingdom.

In Luke 1:52, Mary looked ahead to Christ’s earthly rule saying, **“He had brought rulers down from their thrones, and he has exalted those who were humble.”** Psalms 113:7-8 likewise says of that time, **“He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes, with the princes of His people.”**

Paul delineated a kingdom principle in 1 Corinthians 1:26-28 that God has mostly chosen those who are considered foolish, weak, and lowly in this age to be exalted in the future. Similarly, James explained in verses 1:9 and 2:5 of his letter that God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith and of **“high position”**.

Rewards in Heaven

In Matthew 6:20, 19:21, Mark 10:21, and Luke 12:33, 18:22, Jesus taught that we can store up **“treasure in heaven”**, as opposed to rewards on earth in the next age. Also, in Matthew 5:11-12, He said the heavenly reward of those who experience persecution for following Him will be particularly great.

Questions and Objections

Next, let’s address some common questions and objections about these passages.

What if I’m Not Interested in Earthly Authority?

Perhaps you’re thinking, *“I’m not really interested in politics or ruling. This reward system doesn’t appeal to me.”* However, in scripture, *authority* does not only refer to civil authority. For example, the gospels say Jesus taught with authority (Matthew 7:29). Paul said he was given authority for building up the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 10:8). At its heart, authority actually refers the capacity to bless and serve others. Therefore, those who are given great authority in the next age will be the ones who will bless and serve others on the greatest scale.

Won’t We Will All Be the Same?

Perhaps you’re thinking, *“I’ve been taught we will be all the same in the future.”* However, this idea is not biblical, as we have seen. This idea usually comes from two passages – Galatians 3:28 and the Laborers in the Vineyard parable in Matthew 20.

Galatians 3:28 says, **“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”** However, in context Paul is clearly talking about impartial accessibility to salvation under the new covenant. He’s not talking about a loss of our individual identities or about everyone receiving the same eternal rewards.

The Laborers in the Vineyard parable in Matthew 20 tells of a landowner who hired five groups of workers who each worked less than the previous group. The first group worked all day long and the last group worked just one hour. When it came time to be paid, they were all paid the same amount and the first group was indignant.

The point of this parable is not to contradict all the other passages we saw earlier and teach that everyone will be rewarded the same. Rather, the point is that many people will be rewarded similarly in spite of huge contrasts between how much they work they accomplished because the character we develop is more important than the things we accomplish.

Let me say that again. Our characters will weigh more heavily when we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ than what we works we did, even though those matter too.

In fact, Jesus even concluded this parable by returning to the theme of varying degrees of honor, saying, **“So the last shall be first, and the first last.”** This parable is actually a warning to Christians who over-emphasize works. In effect, Jesus said, *“Be careful that you don’t criticize other believers because they don’t seem to be doing as much work as you. They may actually be godlier in their characters. That kind of critical, self-righteous attitude can knock you down to the last place.”*

What Will Heavenly Rewards Consist Of?

Perhaps you’re thinking, *“What are the rewards in heaven that Jesus talked about? If the resurrected saints are ruling on the earth, how is heaven also a part of their experience?”*

Philippians 3:21 says at the resurrection God will transform our bodies to be like Jesus’ body after he rose. Also, Luke 20:36 says after the resurrection we will be like the angels. Both Jesus and angels have the ability go back and forth between the physical and spiritual realms, as evidenced by a number of scriptures. This is how we will be able to have authority on earth and still enjoy heaven.

So what does it mean to have treasure in heaven? That’s a good question.

The writer of Hebrews said things on earth are like a copy or a shadow of things on heaven (Hebrews 8:5, 9:24). Even though heaven will be more wonderful and beautiful than we can imagine, it may also be familiar. Some of the things we see in scripture in heaven include trees, rivers, streets, homes, food, clothes, loved ones, and familiar materials such as silver and gold. Perhaps there will be other familiar things such as mountains, oceans, gardens, clouds, buildings, animals, etc... In light of this, it is reasonable to consider that treasure in heaven could refer to literal possessions we are given stewardship over.

If so, this is the best retirement plan imaginable. Which is better – storing up earthly wealth for a short retirement in this lifetime, or storing up literal wealth in heaven that will last forever? When Jesus said, **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust**

destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...", perhaps He wasn't being overly spiritual – perhaps He was just being practical.

Don't Eternal Rewards Imply License to Boast?

Perhaps you're thinking, *"If there are eternal rewards, doesn't that lead to pride and boasting, which scripture forbids?"* There are two answers to this question. The first is no – at least not in this life. Scripture repeatedly says we must wait until stand before the Lord in judgment because we cannot accurately judge ourselves or others until then (Romans 14:10-13, 1 Corinthians 4:45). Even the apostle Paul said in the latter passage that although he was conscious of nothing against him that did not absolve him – he had to wait until he stood before Lord.

The second answer is that not all pride and boasting is sinful. There is also a righteous kind. Consider these examples:

- Galatians 6:4 says, **"But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another."**
- Paul said in 2 Corinthians 1:12 he had **"proud confidence"** that he had conducted himself in holiness and sincerity.
- Paul told the Corinthians and Philippians that it was appropriate for them to be **"proud"** of him, since he was a spiritual father to them (2 Corinthians 1:14, 5:12, Philippians 1:26).
- Paul told the Thessalonians that he spoke **"proudly"** about their faith and perseverance to the other churches (2 Thessalonians 1:4).
- Jesus said to one man in Matthew 25:21, **"Well done good and faithful servant"**, which is almost like saying, *"I'm proud of you!"* The same applies to 1 Corinthians 4:5, which says **"...each man's praise will come from God"**.

It is possible to feel godly pride in one's family or nation or ethnicity when we honor the good in them that reflects God's nature, not because we are comparing them with anyone else's or calling them superior. We can feel proud of ourselves for overcoming a temptation or breaking a bad habit or working hard to achieve a goal. A father can be proud of his son because he showed integrity. What son doesn't want to hear his father say, *"Son, I'm proud of you?"* God is a good father and sometimes this is exactly what He says to us.

Perhaps sinful boasting and righteous boasting could be contrasted like this:

- *Sinful* boasting compares our work with someone else's.
- *Righteous* boasting examines our works in light of the grace God provided for them.

- *Sinful* boasting focuses on what we have accomplished apart from God's help or empowerment.
- *Righteous* boasting acknowledges our utter dependence on God's help and empowerment to accomplish anything of eternal value.
- *Sinful* boasting gets our sense of self-worth and acceptability from our works.
- *Righteous* boasting knows our acceptability comes from God's love and mercy, which cannot be added to or taken away from by our works.

What about the Lost?

Perhaps you're thinking, "*What about the lost? Will they also be judged?*" A number of passages such as Ecclesiastes 12:14, Daniel 12:1-2, Matthew 5:28, 13:41-42, 49-50, 25:31-46, 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10, and Revelation 20:12-15, collectively, teach that the lost will also stand before God in judgment and be recompensed for every moral choice they ever made. However, their recompense will be in the context of eternal separation from God, rather than in the context of serving Him on earth and in heaven.

At the judgment, we will see our thoughts, words, actions, and motives from God's holy perspective. Then we will understand how utterly incapable we are of being reconciled to Him on our own merits. The weight of our sins will be unimaginable. Some scholars have considered that it is actually more tolerable for the lost to be separated from God in hell than to remain in His manifest presence with the full weight of their sins still upon them. However, in the case of the believer, that sin is taken off of us and put onto Jesus Christ on the cross. This is the remedy God provided.

Summary

While every choice will be reviewed in judgment, I personally believe the experience will be markedly different for repented sin versus unrepented sin in our lives. The more we allow ourselves to be molded by Christ, the more our past sins will lose their sting in judgment. Instead, they will be turned into a testimony of God's power to deliver and transform.

This is where marriage and parenthood are especially useful. First we learn to love and respect a spouse that is profoundly different than us. Then we learn to work together to serve the needs of dependent, beloved children. It changes us. It teaches and challenges us.

We become stewards not only of wealth or time or talents, but of human beings. We learn to lead with kindness, rule with tenderness, and build with selflessness. We learn to esteem relationships above accomplishments. We learn the culture of the kingdom. We complete God's training program before He sends us out on assignment in the wake of the resurrection.

Next

We have discussed women and authority. What is the foundation of a man's authority? We'll address this question in the next chapter.

Chapter 7 – A Man’s Foundation

Becoming is more important than *doing*. Inside the home is where a man *becomes*; outside the home is where he *does*. A man’s home is where he is most shaped into Christ’s image.

A man’s inside-the-home calling could be compared to a foundation while his outside-the-home calling could be compared to the structure that is built on that foundation. The structure may look more impressive from a distance, but it’s not the most important part. You can have a foundation without a building, but you can never have a building without a foundation. Eventually, it will collapse.

Marriage and Long Term Fruit

One Christian author shared the response he gave when a friend asked him whether he should get married or stay single and devote himself to serving the Lord. He told the man, if you want to be free to serve Christ, stay single. Marriage takes a lot of time. But if you want to become like Christ, get married. Nothing is more powerful for shaping a man into Christ’s image than marriage.

Becoming like Christ is not only superior to doing things for Him, it is more fruitful in the long run. Jesus accomplished more in 3 short years of ministry than any person in human history. A person’s capacity to produce eternal fruit increases exponentially with the maturity of his Christlikeness. A person could perhaps accomplish more in one year with 50% of Christ’s likeness than he could laboring for 30 years with only 10% of His likeness. This is one reason why God is never in a hurry to use us to produce fruit. He is much more interested in us becoming like His Son. If we do this, the fruit will take care of itself.

A Wife is Her Husband’s Crown

Proverbs 12:4 says, **“An excellent wife is the crown of her husband.”** A crown is a symbol of authority. In the God’s kingdom, a man’s authority to lead others comes, in large part, from how he fulfills his charge as a husband. A thriving wife is the seal of his ability to rule. She is the evidence that he can lead in a humble, loving way – the way Christ leads us.

After relating to the Lord 1-on-1, a man’s most important ministry is to his wife. She is his first disciple. He is not really qualified for this since he is not above her, spiritually. Therefore, the largest part of his headship is really to model humility and dependence on the Lord. When we lead from a place of dependence on the Lord, He gives us grace for it.

God’s Blanket Statement Concerning Marriage

God’s blanket statement concerning marriage since the beginning of creation is Genesis 2:18, **“It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.”** Husbands and wives need each other. God alone does not fully satisfy us because He did not create us to be satisfied only by Him. Even though Adam lived in God’s manifest presence and talked with Him

face to face, God still said he was **“alone”**. Without a woman, he was incomplete. He could never become who he was called to become or do what he was called to do. This is as true of us as it was for Adam.

This applies to every person not specifically called to singleness, or to seasons of singleness. When the disciples said it is better for a man not to marry, Jesus replied in Matthew 19:11, **“Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given.”** In other words, the calling to remain single is *given* to certain individuals.

Similarly, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:7, **“Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am [referring to his singleness]. However, each man has his own gift from God...”** Notice how Paul reaffirms what Jesus said in Matthew 19:11 – marriage or singleness is based a man’s **“own gift from God”**, or his calling.

The second thing to understand about Paul’s statement is this: It is right and good for every person to sincerely feel like his or her calling is the best calling in the world. If we fully knew everything God had in mind for us, we would never want to be anyone else. This is how Paul felt.

Have you ever said about a close friend or family member, *“I hope they meet someone and get married someday”*? Or maybe you’ve said, *“I hope they have children someday”*. We say things like this because we sincerely believe marriage and parenthood are wonderful and fulfilling and they would be missing out by not experiencing them. It is good and right for us to feel this way because marriage and family are part of our calling. However, Paul felt the same way about remaining single. It was no sacrifice for him because it was his calling. He considered it a *gift*, not a sacrifice.

If a man or woman remains single who was not specifically called to singleness, either because of choice or circumstances, God can certainly redeem this. He or she can still enjoy close fellowship and community with others, have deep intimacy with God, and be used powerfully by Him. However, given the choice, Genesis 2:18 should be a believer’s default approach toward marriage.

The Power of Two

Several passages of scripture indicate that there is something very special about the power of two people being in agreement. Here are some examples:

“Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him.” (Eccl 4:9-12)

“Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.” (Matt 18:19-20)

“How could one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight...”
(Deuteronomy 32:20)

Another example can be found in Mark 6:7 when Jesus **“began to send them out in pairs, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.”** Notice how Jesus linked these two together – being assigned a partner and being given authority over the enemy.

These passages highlight some of the advantages of two equally yoked people partnering together. They comfort, protect, and rescue each other. They multiply each other’s labor, prayers, and warfare. They invite the manifest of God into their midst. They keep one another accountable, encouraged, and focused on the mission Jesus gave us.

There is no context to which this principle is more applicable than marriage. This is why it is so deep in God’s heart for husbands and wives to learn how to labor together in unity. His kingdom depends on it. The power and light of His church rises and falls dramatically according to the oneness of its marriages.

Perhaps the prophet Isaiah was an example of this. Isaiah was given the most panoramic vision of any Old Testament prophet. His book is filled with lucid prophecies not only of his own time, but also of Christ’s First Coming, Second Coming, and the Millennial Kingdom. Perhaps part of what prepared him to be entrusted with these revelations was that fact that he was equally yoked to a prophetess wife (Isaiah 8:3) and devotedly raised his children to be **“signs and wonders in Israel from the Lord”** (Isaiah 8:18). This is a rare and outstanding quality among Old Testament prophets, or among *any* of the men in scripture.

Satan Forbade Ministers to Marry

A man desperately needs the influence of a woman in his life to minister to others. He is incomplete without her. He is unbalanced in his view of the world and unprotected from the enemy. Perhaps for this reason the enemy inspired a doctrine that forbade ministers to marry for so many centuries. Satan knew the church’s power would be severely handicapped if its leaders were cut off from marriage and family.

It is easy to feel godly and surrendered to the Lord when we are all alone. However, when every decision must take into consideration someone with completely different needs and desires, we begin to see how selfish and immature we are. Then, when we must work together with our spouse to serve totally dependent children, we see our condition even more clearly.

Unless he has grace for singleness, a man will never reach his full potential without his wife’s input. So many men in spiritual leadership have become imbalanced and deceived either

because they did not marry or because they did not let their wives speak into their lives. They only had one part of God's perspective of themselves and their ministries because they didn't receive the rest from their wives, which left them unprotected from the enemy.

When Jealousy Is Godly

One of the ways a wife protects her husband is by becoming jealous when anything other than God becomes more important to him than her. Because men are more accomplishment oriented it is easy for them to unconsciously put ministries, careers, or other outside-the-home pursuits ahead of their wives. And since our marriage relationships often reflect our relationships with God, this is usually a strong indicator that they are also putting these things before Him. Sometimes a woman's jealousy is a reflection of her own insecurity, but other times it is a reflection God's nature in her, which He expressed in Exodus 34:14, saying His name is "**Jealous**".

When a woman expresses jealousy, a wise man will recognize this as a gift and examine himself. She may be protecting him from the most dangerous and subtle sin there is – idolatry. By calling him back into relationship with herself, she also calls him back into relationship with God, and reminds him that relationships in general are more important than accomplishments.

The same can be true of women. If a husband is grieved or jealous over a wife's lack of attention to their marriage because she is so focused on caring for her children (or other pursuits), this could be an indicator of her idolatry. It's possible the husband is just having trouble adjusting to sharing her with their children. However, if she really does value her children in her heart more than her husband, she is putting the third most important thing in her life ahead the second. This may very well mean she is also putting them ahead of the *first* – she may be finding her sense of purpose and fulfillment more from her children than from God.

Because we live in such a fallen world, idolatry can feel natural and right. Likewise, keeping proper priorities can feel uncomfortable and even wrong. It takes careful intention and faith to agree with God over our feelings and desires.

My Pride and Idolatry

Early in my marriage, I had an intense zeal for the Lord, but was also full of pride and selfish ambition. My outside-the-home calling was the most important thing in the world to me. Together, these traits were toxic and dangerous.

Because Jenny was less intense than I was, I always felt afraid she would somehow hold me back from my fulfilling my calling. However, whenever I brought this to the Lord, I felt as though He was saying *I needed Jenny to fulfill my calling*. If I had known the extent of my pride and idolatry, this would have made sense. If I had been willing to listen to her, God could have used her to protect me. But I wasn't willing and it nearly destroyed everything good in my life.

Jesus Our Model

There is a sense in which Jesus modeled putting family above of ministry. Although He was called to singleness, Jesus did have a small group of people who were like family to Him that He prioritized ahead of everyone else. He even called them His family members (see Matthew 12:49).

Try to imagine yourself in Jesus' position. You are the most famous minister in your nation. Huge crowds flocked to you continually. Everywhere you minister countless people are saved, healed, and delivered. The whole nation is being transformed because of the revival you are leading.

Human logic suggested Jesus should have fully devoted Himself to visible, "platform" ministry, but this is not what He did. Instead, He regularly left the masses behind to devote huge amounts of focused time to His disciples and the women who travelled with them. This is analogous to a man putting his wife and children ahead of his ministry.

Sometimes, doing the humbler, small-picture thing ultimately bears more fruit than the outwardly impressive, big-picture thing. A man's wife and children are his first disciples. Can a man really consider his ministry a success if he fails with his first disciples?

If Jesus had only ministered to the multitudes, much of the fruit of His ministry would have been lost since no one would have gotten close enough to Him to carry on His legacy. In the same way, our greatest eternal fruit is borne out of our closest relationships, not our most visible accomplishments.

Next

Ephesians 5:1 tells us to **"be imitators of God"**. How do husbands and wives represent God to one another? We'll find out in the next chapter.

Chapter 8 – Representing God to Our Spouse

How a Husband Represents God to His Wife

Ephesians 5:25-27 says:

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

This passage suggests that husbands, in part, are responsible for their wives’ spiritual growth. We will be accountable for their condition when we stand before the Judgment Seat. The more we experience how Christ relates to us, the more we will be able to mirror Him to our wives. Consider some of the Lord’s attributes and how they apply to marriage:

He Initiates

1 John 4:10 says that God first loved us and gave Himself up for us. God is the Initiator; our love is in response to His love. This is a picture of how husbands and wives relate. A man initiates intimacy and romance. A woman’s love is awakened when she is loved and pursued first.

His Motives Are Trustworthy

We don’t need to resent being subject to Christ’s headship because we can trust His motives. He is selfless. Everything He does is for our sake, not His. Likewise, when a wife knows her husband is more concerned with her dreams, goals, and well-being than his own, it is much easier to follow his lead.

He Listens

Prayer is our most vital connection with the Lord. It is where we experience His attentive presence and compassion. It is where we discover that He hears us and cares about what we are going through. He listens to our requests and He is truly affected by them.

Likewise, when a husband listens attentively to His wife and really cares about what she feels, this is the life of their marriage. It is what enables her to flourish.

Both spouses at times need to share their burdens and ask for support. However, it is common for wives to need this with greater frequency than men. This is not inappropriate. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:3, **“But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman...”**

Because Christ covers the husband directly, he is more responsible to work through some of his challenges privately, between him and the Lord, when it is appropriate. Sometimes it is wise to shield his wife from some of what he is carrying if sharing every detail would not be helpful or productive.

However, because the husband covers the wife, he is responsible to provide a safe place for her to honestly process through what she is feeling. He acts as “a container” for her emotions so she is more able to manage them – just as Christ does when we bring our burdens before Him.

He Speaks

When the Lord speaks, His words are affirming, encouraging, and wise. They give life. He doesn't shame us or harshly condemns us. He helps us see ourselves or our situation from a perspective of hope. When a husband speaks this way to his wife, it washes her from the negative messages of the world. It breaks down her fear and returns her focus to the goodness and faithfulness of God.

He Entrusts Responsibility

The Lord entrusts us with responsibility. Imagine leading a family, or a business, or a ministry. How does Christ relate to us in that position of leadership? He doesn't expect perfection. He doesn't shame us for making mistakes or cancel our calling if we stumble. Nor does He try to control everything. He lets us truly take ownership. He gives us space and freedom to try different approaches. He is as involved as we want Him to be. He waits to be asked for help. When we seek His help, He is patient, encouraging, and helpful. He lets us know that He believes in us.

A wife needs this same kind of treatment from her husband as she runs her home or manages other responsibilities in her life. She needs to believe she can be successful and not live in fear of making a mistake or being a disappointment. She needs to know her husband believes in her and supports her.

He Intercedes and Protects

Romans 8:34 says that Jesus intercedes for us. Many other passages, particularly in Psalms and Proverbs, say that He stands watch over us and protects us from spiritual attack. He is constantly intervening on our behalf when we are completely unaware. Husbands have a similar role. No one's prayers on earth carry more authority in a life of a woman than her husband's. He is her covering. His prayers really do make a difference. Real, actual grace from heaven is released and real, actual powers of hell are rebuked when a husband decides to pray for his wife. Husbands have no idea how much she needs this.

How a Wife Represents God to Her Husband

If a husband represents Christ to his wife, how does a wife represent God to her husband? When God was about to create Eve, He called her Adam's *helper*. This same word for Helper (*ezer*) is used to describe God as our Helper in several passages such as Psalm 70:5 and Psalm 121:2.

The role of a *helper* is such an important aspect of God's nature that it is a primary title given to a member of the Trinity. Jesus repeatedly called the Holy Spirit "**Helper**" in John 14-16 (NASB translation). The etymology of the Greek word used for the Holy Spirit in this passage means *called to one's side*, just as Eve was taken out of Adam's side. The Holy Spirit may provide the best model for how wives relate to their husbands.

Sometimes God relates to us as a Master – He gives specific commands and expects immediate obedience (ex. Luke 17:10). However, when God relates to us as a Helper, it is different. A Helper is the opposite of an initiator. A Helper does not tell us what decision to make. Instead, He gives counsel. He makes suggestions and offers support. He doesn't step out in front to lead; He comes alongside and encourages.

This is an incredible aspect of God's nature. God is infinitely wise so He could easily tell us exactly what to do in every situation. But instead He comes in humility and offers assistance. When we dig our heels in and ignore the Holy Spirit's help (as we all have) He does not become resentful. He may be grieved, but He accepts our decision and does not abandon us. He stays with us and works to bring about redemption. He still tries to guide us into as much blessing as possible on the lesser, harder path we chose. God's ability to not hold a grudge over a bad decision, but continue helping us in humility, is truly amazing.

My wife Jenny has modeled to me many times. She knew deep in her heart that some choices I made were not right. She communicated it clearly and respectfully and I wouldn't listen. Even though it affected her deeply, and even though I did not recognize I had done anything wrong for a long time, she did not become bitter. She continued to support me and encourage me.

When the Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts, He is gentle and reasonable, not pushy or demanding. Have you noticed that? Even when He rebukes us or convicts us, we can feel that He loves us and wants what's best for us. Many times when my wife has spoken to me about things I didn't want to hear, I had that same feeling. I knew the Holy Spirit was speaking through her.

The *helper* ministry may be the most beautiful, gentle, and humble way that God relates to people. And the Bible designates this aspect of God's nature for wives to emulate as the most effective way to bless and guide their husbands.

Next

What happens when a married couple must make a major decision together? How should they make it? What biblical principles apply? We'll discuss this in the next chapter.

Chapter 9 – Major Decisions

When a couple faces a major decision, there is no single formula for how to handle it. Instead, there are different biblical principles that could apply depending on the situation and how God is leading each spouse at that time. Here are several possibilities for how God may lead a husband and wife through a major decision together:

- 1) There are multiple options within God's will. There is room for discussion, personal preference, and compromise.
- 2) The husband and wife are in agreement about how the Lord is leading them. Unity comes easily and they proceed together.
- 3) The Lord impresses upon the wife to submit to her husband's lead. She knows her husband is being led by the Lord. This is a picture of Christ acting as the head of the church. Ephesians 5:22-24 applies.
- 4) The Lord impresses upon the husband to listen to his wife's counsel. He knows his wife is being led the Lord. This is a picture of the Holy Spirit acting as the Helper.
- 5) The Lord impresses upon the wife to submit to her husband's lead, but she *does not* know whether her husband is being led by the Lord. She only knows the Lord is asking her to submit to him.
- 6) The Lord impresses upon the husband to defer to his wife. He *does not* know whether his wife is being led by the Lord. He only knows the Lord is asking him to defer to her. This may have been the case with Sarah and Abraham in Genesis 21:12.
- 7) The Lord impresses upon the wife to submit to her husband's lead even though she knows he *is not* being led by the Lord. He is either deceived or he is intentionally disobeying. However, the Lord asks her to entrust herself to His care and pray for her husband's heart. 1 Peter 3:1 applies. This is a picture of how the Holy Spirit continues to love us and pursue relationship with us even when we are disobedient.
- 8) The Lord impresses upon the husband to defer to his wife even though he knows *she is not* being led by the Lord. She is either deceived or she is intentionally disobeying. However, the Lord asks him to lay the situation down before Him and pray for his wife's heart. This is a picture of how Jesus treats His church when we resist His will for us.

How to Handle Disagreement

We can only control our own response to a major disagreement, not our spouse's. Whatever he or she does, scripture exhorts us to still represent God to them. If a husband believes his wife

should submit to him about particular decision, but she is unwilling, he should accept it without becoming bitter, just as Jesus frequently does with His church. Then he should seek God for his next step. Likewise, if a wife believes her husband should listen to her counsel, but he is unwilling, she should accept it without becoming bitter, just as the Holy Spirit frequently does with us, and seek God for her next step.

With many decisions, the process is actually more important than the outcome. If one or both spouses honor God and each other in how they walk through the decision-making process, they can be victorious in His eyes regardless of what decision is made.

A Journal Entry

Once I was feeling anxious about missing out on God's best if Jenny and I couldn't come to an agreement about an important decision. I shared this with the Lord. Then I decided to take out a journal and ask for help to verbalize a wise, godly response to this fear. The entry I wrote greatly encouraged me and became a basis for making decisions together ever since:

God can cover imperfect decision-making that is done with a heart to preserve marital unity. If one partner expresses his conviction but then relents or waits for the other, it lets her feel free and empowered and trusted, and it gives God time to work.

With major decisions, you should say, "This is what I'm feeling like we should do, but we won't do it if you're not in agreement." And then be willing to not do it if she doesn't agree. God can cover this, and He can even redeem it, making it better.

You should not say, "This is what we are doing because God said it." Jenny hears from God too. Also, you can both be deceived. But together you are better off, safer, and more covered from deception than apart. God is PATIENT in bringing about His will in your lives and you must be patient too. Love is patient.

God is not anxious for you to reach any particular milestone in your journey. It is more important to Him that your marriage is on solid footing. God is never in a hurry, even if you are. It is better to take the long road and preserve marital oneness than rush to the right outcome, but damage trust and intimacy in the process.

God is not worried about the future even if you feel worried. He will always give you a clear way forward. He will not feel perplexed if Jenny is not in agreement with what you think He is speaking to you. He can always find a way to work with you both to bring about His best, but only if you give Him space and time to work.

Handling God's Words

Sometimes God gives clear, specific guidance to a married couple about a major decision. However, we can still miss out on God's best if we mishandle His words or if the enemy

deceives us. This can be seen in scripture the very first time a married couple faced a major decision. Let's take a look at four mistakes Adam and Eve made in handling God's words when they faced the decision of whether to eat the forbidden fruit in Genesis 3:1-6.

Distort or Add to God's Word

First, Satan tried to distort what God had said. He asked Eve if they could **"not eat from any tree in the garden"** when in reality God only identified one tree they couldn't eat from. Eve successfully rejected Satan's suggestion, but then made the mistake of adding to God's word, saying they were also not permitted to **"touch it"**.

Doubt God's Word

Second, Satan tempted Eve to doubt God's words, saying, **"You will not surely die"** if you eat from the tree.

Rush or Take a Forbidden Shortcut

Third, Satan said, **"In the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."** Satan was offering Eve a shortcut to what God already planned to give them. Satan knew this temptation would be powerful because it was the very thing they were created for.

God *wanted* Adam and Eve's eyes to be opened eyes (ex. Ephesian 1:18). He wanted them to be like Him (ex. Ephesians 5:1). He wanted them to discern of good and evil (ex. Hebrews 5:14). Adam and Eve were sinless in the beginning, but they were not yet mature. Each of these attributes would have increased in them the longer they walked with God.

Satan tried the same thing with Jesus when he offered Him authority over the kingdoms of the earth if He would bow down and worship him (Matthew 4:9). Jesus was already called to rule over the earth, but Satan offered a forbidden shortcut.

Fail to Contend for God's Word

The Bible said that Adam **"was with"** Eve (Genesis 3:6) when she was tempted. He knew Satan was lying. He knew Eve was being deceived. Yet he didn't say anything. He didn't stand up and contend for the good things God had in store for him and his wife.

Other Passages

Here are several other places in scripture where the four aforementioned principles for handling God's words can be seen:

- Satan tempted Jesus to doubt God's word to Him about His identity. In Matthew 3:17, the Father said to Jesus, **"This is My beloved Son..."** However, a short while later in Matthew 4:3, 6, Satan said, **"If you are really the Son of God..."**
- David doubted God's promise to make him king, saying, **"Now I will perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than to escape in the land of the Philistines."** (1 Samuel 27:1)
- Satan tempted Jesus to rush the fulfillment of God's plan for Him to rule over the nations of the earth, saying, **"All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me."** (Matthew 4:9)
- Abraham tried to rush the fulfillment of God's promise to give him and Sarah a son by sleeping with Sarah's servant Hagar (Genesis 16).
- A prophet had clear instructions from the Lord, but listened to another man who added to or distorted what God said. The prophet listened to the man and it cost him his life. (1 Kings 13)
- Paul exhorted Timothy to use the prophecies about him like weapons with which to **"fight the good fight"**, because he knew Timothy would have to contend for their fulfillment (1 Timothy 1:18).
- The saints in scripture had to exercise **"faith and patience"** to **"inherit the promises"** God gave to them (Hebrews 6:12).

Summary

Not all of the good plans God has for His children come to pass. Sometimes, in order to be fulfilled, they require something on our part. They require us to believe what He says, wait patiently for it, contend for it, and be careful not to distort or add to what He has spoken. Adam and Eve's mistakes are recorded in scripture so we can avoid repeating them when we face with major decisions in our own lives.

Marriage is the primary relationship through which God confirms His guidance and safeguards us from the deception. We may struggle at times to know with certainty how God is leading us. Satan may try to distort what God is saying. Satan may try to sow doubt, impatience, or apathy in our hearts with regard to God's promises. But two are stronger than one. Husbands and wives can listen to each other, pray for each other, wait for each other, and encourage each other to fight for God's promises. We are far more likely to reach our destinies with each other's help than by journeying alone.

Next

If the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, does that mean the husband has all the authority? The answer may surprise you. We'll cover this topic and others in the next chapter.

Chapter 10 – What Does Headship Look Like?

Ephesians 5:22-23 says, **“Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of church...”** Taken by itself, one could conclude this passage gives all decision-making authority to the husband. But is this actually the way Christ relates to His bride? Is this how He exercises authority? To answer this question, consider some of Jesus’ final words to His bride before His ascension in Matthew 28:18-20:

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

The implications of this verse are far-reaching. The Father gave *all* authority to Jesus. So what did He do with it? He immediately turned around, gave it *all* over to His Bride, and sent her out on His behalf to use it for God’s kingdom. In essence Jesus said, *“I won’t do anything apart from you. You and I are now one flesh. Your willing cooperation with Me is a prerequisite for anything I will ever do in the earth.”* So who really has the authority, Jesus or His bride? Both. They are mutually dependent on one another. Neither can accomplish anything without the other – not because God is limited, but because He has chosen to work with and through His bride rather than apart from her.

God is Affected by Us

Jesus’ headship in our lives is not formulaic – it’s relational. Sometimes He leads in a way we wouldn’t have expected or chosen and asks us to follow; other times He helps us pursue a desire that came from our own heart. Sometimes He waits to be asked for help; other times He sees us struggling and pursues us on His own initiative. Sometimes we ask for something that perhaps wasn’t part of His original plan, but His heart is moved by our request. It is a real relationship. God is actually affected by our prayers, dreams, and desires. Sometimes He even changes His plans in response to us. There are many, *many* examples of this in scripture. Let’s briefly look at two.

The construction of Solomon’s temple was a significant event in Israel’s history because it was the first permanent dwelling place for the manifest presence of God. But whose idea was it? Was it God’s? 2 Chronicles 6 tells us:

“‘Since the day that I brought My people from the land of Egypt, I did not choose a city out of all the tribes of Israel in which to build a house that My name might be there...’ Now it was in the heart of my father David to build a house for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. But the Lord said to my father David, ‘Because it was in

your heart to build a house for My name, you did well that it was in your heart.” (2 Chronicles 6:5-8)

God had no intention of building a permanent house for His presence. It was David’s heart and initiative – and God honored it. Such a major event, recorded in scripture forever, occurred not because of God’s desire, but because of David’s. David affected the heart of God.

Second, let’s look at Jesus’ first miracle – turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana.

“When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, ‘They have no wine.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come.’ His mother said to the servants, ‘Whatever He says to you, do it.’ ...Jesus said to them, ‘Fill the waterpots with water.’ So they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, ‘Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter.’ So they took it to him. When the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine [he] ...called the bridegroom, and said to him, ‘Every man serves the good wine first, ...but you have kept the good wine until now.’ This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.” (John 2:3-11)

Jesus only did what He saw the Father doing (John 5:19-20). When Jesus told Mary His time had not yet come, He meant what He said. The Father had shown Jesus it was not yet time for Him to perform a miracle in the way Mary was asking. But this didn’t deter Mary; she turned to the servants and told them to do whatever Jesus asked.

This was an act of faith and intercession. She wasn’t disregarding what Jesus said. Nor was she demanding anything from God. But she *was* making an appeal. In her heart, she desired for God to intervene on behalf of these newlyweds whom she loved. God was so moved that He changed what He was showing Jesus. The timing and circumstances of Jesus’ first miracle were forever altered because of Mary’s appeal.

There are many other passages in scripture where God changes his mind, or expresses a willingness to change His mind, in response to one or more of His people. Examples include Exodus 32:14, 33:1-14, Numbers 14:12-20, 16:20-35, 41-48, Deuteronomy 9:13-25, Psalms 11:1-2, 106:23, 1 Kings 21:21-29, 2 Samuel 24:12-25, Amos 7:1-6, Judges 10:13-14, 2 Chronicles 12:1-8, Ezekiel 4:9-15, 2 Kings 20, Isaiah 38:1-5, Joel 2:13-14, and Jeremiah 18:7-10. Some of these passages even use the exact wording, **“...the Lord changed His mind”**. If marriage is meant to be a picture of how God relates to His people, it certainly follows that a Christ-like husband can be affected by the feelings, dreams, desires, and requests of his wife, just as God is affected by ours.

If God is really changes His plans sometimes in response to His bride’s heartfelt desires, husbands should be ready to do the same. This can even be true of a plan God specifically puts on a husband’s heart for how to lead his family. If his wife is not in agreement and appeals for an alternative, God may be moved by her appeal and alter the original instruction He gave the

husband. Therefore, when working through a decision-making process, husbands and wives must be careful to listen to each other's input, pray together, and continually seek the Lord for the next step.

A husband should also be open to the possibility that God wants to put the decision in his wife's hands. In Genesis 21, Abraham had a major decision to make concerning his family. Sarah wanted him to send away his oldest son, Ishmael. Abraham was greatly distressed. When Abraham brought this before the Lord, God said, **"Whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her."** In essence, God said, *"I want you to put this decision in Sarah's hands. It's not yours to make."*

Who Has God's Perspective?

My marriage broke down, in part, because I mistakenly believed being the head meant God would always lead through me and Jenny should submit to me in every major decision. When my marriage was being restored I learned that God can give wisdom and discernment to either spouse. Here are two examples that come to mind of when my wife Jenny had the Lord's perspective about important decisions.

One time, a number of circumstances lined up in a way that led me to think the Lord had opened a door of financial opportunity to me. Jenny felt strongly it was not a wise decision, but I didn't listen. My choice ultimately resulted in deep debt. It wasn't until years later I saw the foolishness of my choice.

Another time we were initially in agreement about a major decision. We had prayed, talked, and sought counsel. But as the deadline to make the final decision approached, Jenny's peace left her. I still wanted to move forward. We had one final time of prayer and conversation. As I began to share my thoughts, I suddenly became deeply convicted it wasn't the right decision. Jenny later told me that everything in her wanted to speak up, but she felt the Holy Spirit telling her to remain silent. Her obedience opened the door for the God to move on my heart.

In marriage, each partner will have discernment about different situations at different times. Sometimes the husband has God's perspective. Sometimes the wife has it. Sometimes each has a part of it. Sometimes neither has it and they need input from others or they just need to put the decision aside for a while and trust God to reveal His perspective at a later time.

Next

What should a wife do if her husband is not following the Lord in a major decision but He impresses upon her heart to submit to his lead anyway? Does scripture give a strategy for how to handle this situation? We'll find out in the next chapter.

Chapter 11 – The 1 Peter 3 Strategy

One of the possibilities I listed earlier for how God may lead a couple through a major decision was this:

The Lord asks the wife to submit to her husband's lead even though she knows he is not being led by the Lord. The Lord is asking her to entrust herself to His care and pray for her husband's heart through the process. 1 Peter 3 applies. This is a picture of how the Holy Spirit continues to love us and pursue relationship with us even when we are disobedient.

1 Peter 3 gives a specific *strategy* for a specific kind of *situation* with a specific *goal* in mind. This strategy is tailored according to how men are designed and motivated. The first two verses state:

“In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.”

Situation: A husband is being disobedient to God.
Strategy: Chaste, respectful, submissive behavior toward her husband.
Goal: The husband's repentance.

Why is this strategy effective? Men innately value respect, leadership, and hierarchy. In fact, some studies show most men would much rather feel respected than loved. When a man is treated with unconditional respect by his wife, even when he doesn't deserve it, it can awaken something inside of him. It can remind him of his calling – to be a noble, sacrificial leader.

When men are made responsible for other men, they usually consider it a sacred charge. For example, if a man is made the captain of a ship and the ship is sinking, he is the very last one to disembark. He makes sure everyone else gets to safety first because that is his duty. He doesn't even have to be a particularly moral man. He considers it an honor to be entrusted with a position of such authority and he acts accordingly.

Likewise, when a woman treats her husband as the captain of their family, it calls forth the best in him. He will still make mistakes and act selfishly at times. However, he is more likely to feel the weight of his position of leadership if his wife treats him as though he really carries it. Her respect helps God open his eyes to who he really is.

This does not mean she shouldn't be honest if she disapproves of his choices. Even on a military vessel, trusted subordinates have permission to voice disagreement with the captain. Nor does it mean she should not share how his choices are affecting her or their family. However, it does mean she treats him respectfully in spite of her disapproval.

The Battle with Fear

Next, verses 3-6 state:

“Your adornment must not be merely external..., but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.”

These verses discuss the battle between faith and fear that a wife is likely to experience while executing the strategy God gave in verses 1-2. There is incredible vulnerability in treating someone with undeserved respect who has a measure of authority over you. It is very easy to become fearful that nothing will change and they will continue to mistreat you or mislead you. A woman who chooses to follow this strategy for changing her husband really has nothing to hope in except God. She relinquishes all of her own tools and methods.

The passage encourages a wife to adorn herself with a gentle and quiet spirit because at times she will be filled with loud, fearful thoughts. Therefore, the only way to persevere in this strategy is to somehow become quiet before the Lord so He can sustain her with His peace. (The posture of having a gentle and quiet spirit is equally valid for men when battling against fear.)

Finally, the passage encourages wives to emulate a woman from scripture, Sarah, who successfully executed this strategy with her husband even though he committed serious sins against their marriage. Sarah continued to honor and respect Abraham even though he twice allowed her to be taken into the harems of foreign kings and repeatedly tried to circumvent her role in the promises of God for their family line. She was a truly amazing overcomer. It is no wonder her greatness is captured forever in several portions of scripture. The greatness of Abraham would be non-existent if it wasn't for the greatness of his wife. We will discuss Sarah and Abraham more in a future chapter.

Summary

God's kingdom works oppositely to how the world and the flesh lead us. We humble ourselves to be exalted. We give to be entrusted with more. We serve to become leaders. We bless when we are cursed. Along these same lines, wives treat disobedient husbands with chastity, respect, and submission in order to change them.

The world and the flesh tell wives to become fearful, nag, control, or manipulate. God tells wives to share their input with their husbands honestly, gently, and without fear. God says to respect him as the head and pray that he feels the burden of leadership God has placed on his shoulders. Pray for God to change his heart.

Next

God delights in husbands and wives loving each other, but He also warns against the danger of turning our spouse into an idol. This is the topic of the next chapter.

Chapter 12 – Guarding Against Idolatry

1 Corinthians 7:33-34 says:

“...but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided... But the one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband.”

Paul actually called the desire of husbands and wives to please one another a thing **“of the world”**. He said it divides their interests and hinders their devotion to God. This is because having as a primary goal pleasing one’s spouse is actually idolatry. Husbands’ and wives’ main goal in marriage should be to please God, not each other.

Men and Pleasing

One of the deepest needs of a man’s heart is to feel *successful*. This is as true of his marriage as other areas of his life. Men want to feel successful as husbands. But how does a man know whether he is successful? What criteria should he use to judge himself?

For many men, the natural inclination is to ask, *“Is my wife pleased with how I’m treating her?”* The more pleased she is, the more successful he feels. The more displeased she is, the more he feels like a failure.

This can be a very good question to ask, to a degree, since men and women are so different. Paying attention to what pleases his wife helps a man learn about her unique needs. However, taking this question to an extreme causes a man to conduct himself in marriage more for the approval of his wife than for God, which is idolatry.

A friend of mine was having a lot of conflict in his marriage. At one point he said to me, *“I feel like nothing I do is ever good enough for her.”* There was something about the way he said this that sounded unhealthy. He seemed overly desperate for her approval. I wanted to say to him, *“It doesn’t have to be good enough for her. It only has to be good enough for God.”* Instead I just listened and then prayed by myself afterward that God would open his eyes to the root problem. Three days later when we met again, he told me God had spoken to him. God said he was making his wife into an idol and was seeking her approval more than His.

There could be times in a marriage when a man loves his wife very well, but she is unable to receive it, and may even resent it, because of issues she’s facing in her own heart. That is when a man needs to look toward heaven and sense the Lord’s affirmation of him. Then he will be able to give his wife freedom to work through the issues coming up in her heart without becoming resentful or angry that she is not meeting his need to feel successful as a husband. He gets this need fulfilled by Christ.

Women and Pleasing

One of a woman's deepest needs is for safe, secure, emotionally connected relationships, especially in her marriage. This can lead a woman to prioritize relational harmony over helping her husband become the man he is called to be. This too is idolatry because she is more concerned with pleasing her husband than God.

When a wife is overly concerned with whether her husband is pleased with her, she does him a disservice. She will likely shy away from saying something he needs to hear if it is going to create conflict. However, if her main goal is to please God, she will take the risk of being gently, respectfully honest with him even if it makes him angry.

Pleasing God may mean holding him accountable if he is sinning. It may mean reminding him of his responsibility to lead, protect, or provide for their family. This reminder will ring hollow if she does it out of self-interest or manipulation. However, if she does it out of a sincere desire to help him become the man God created him to be, the Lord may use her obedience to work on his heart.

Pressure and Control

On the other hand, sometimes husbands and wives go in the opposite direction. Instead of being overly dependent on our spouse's approval, we are overly dependent on their behavior conforming to our wishes. Therefore, we try to *control* them using pressure, guilt, nagging, manipulation, anger, or intimidation. In Christian marriages, this is often *spiritualized*, which put a righteous-appearing masking on abusive treatment.

This too is idolatry. Our need to control our spouse reveals that they really control us. It shows that our ability to experience peace depends on them doing what we want. It shows that we're looking to them for fulfillment more than we're looking to God.

For years, I pressured my wife Jenny to do what I wanted her to do or think what I wanted her to think. If she had a different doctrine, I felt threatened. If she had a different opinion, I got defensive. If she challenged my perspective, I got angry. I eventually learned the hard way that buried deep underneath my need to control Jenny was unrelenting fear.

Fear is almost always at the root of control, pressure, guilt, nagging, manipulation, anger, or intimidation. We fear of losing control of our future. We fear missing out. We fear being taken advantage of or taken for granted. We fear being hurt or rejected. We fear looking weak or foolish. We fear our ugliest character flaws being exposed.

If we can learn to identify the specific fear we feel and then share with our spouse in a gentle, non-critical way, this one habit can be the difference between divorce and decades of

intimacy. However, it can be uncomfortably vulnerable to say to our spouse, *I feel afraid that...* So instead we resort to anger because anger feels powerful and safe.

In the short term, pressure, guilt, nagging, manipulation, anger, or intimidation may be effective in getting our spouse to do what we want. But it will inevitably cause resentment to build up and destroy intimacy. Therefore, one of the greatest challenges of marriage is choosing to be vulnerable instead of angry or critical.

Jesus on Idolatry

Jesus indicated a spouse can become an idol. In Luke 14, He told a parable about a man inviting many people to a dinner he was hosting, which represented God inviting us to be a part of His kingdom. But they all began to make excuses for not coming. One of the invitees said, **“I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.”** (vs. 20) This symbolized a man making his wife into an idol and using his marriage as an excuse for not fully surrendering his life to the Lord. He was more concerned with pleasing her than God.

Six verses later, Jesus said, **“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.”** Why did Jesus choose such hard, provocative words? Because it is so difficult in our fallen world not to look more to family relationships for approval than to God. It may be the most common and socially acceptable form of idolatry. For many people, it is the most difficult stronghold they will ever face.

Next

The world claims that purity undermines sexual passion and fulfillment. The Bible teaches the opposite. Which one is correct? We'll find out in the next chapter.

Chapter 13 – Purity

Purity enhances physical intimacy in marriage. Purity saves all the sexual desire God hard-wired into men and women for the perfect context, where it can be expressed without shame. Put bluntly, purity equals the best sex possible over the course of a lifetime. However, when sexual desire begins to be aroused or expressed in impure ways, either through thoughts or actions, it diminishes the power of God's gift and introduces underlying guilt.

To learn more about purity, let's turn to the book of Proverbs. Proverbs identifies three factors that affect purity for men in particular, but they are applicable to women as well. The first is modeling and counsel from a father figure or mother figure. The second is purity in women. The third is a satisfying sexual relationship in marriage. Let's briefly look at each one.

First – Father Figures and Purity

Nothing sets a man's feet on a course for sexual fulfillment like a father figure who models purity and respect for women. The primary voice that speaks in the early chapters of Proverbs regarding sexual purity is that of a father speaking to his son. Here's how a few of these passages begin:

"My son, if you will receive my words..." (2:1)

"My son, give attention to my wisdom." (5:1)

"My son, observe the commandment of your father." (6:20)

"My son, keep my words, and treasure my commandments within you..." (7:1)

It is human nature to be conformed into the image of whatever we spend the most time beholding. This is why, in order to be changed into Christ's image, Hebrews 2:12 commands us to fix **"our eyes on Jesus"** and why 2 Corinthians 3:18 commands us to **"behold [Jesus] as in a mirror"**. Jesus is our mirror – the more we behold Him, the more we become like Him.

One of the ways men can behold Christ is by observing His attributes in a father figure who is older and more mature. When a father models sexual purity, it creates an association between masculinity and purity. It connects courage with overcoming lust. It demonstrates that purity in a depraved world is heroic rather than something to be mocked.

Second – Purity in Women

It is interesting that one of the characters in the Bible who helps men overcome lust is a woman. The early chapters of Proverbs call men to depend on Wisdom, personified as a woman, in this battle. For example, Proverbs 7:4-5 says:

“Say to wisdom, ‘You are my sister,’ and call understanding your intimate friend; that they may keep you from an adulteress, from the foreigner who flatters with her words.”

Women of purity break the power of lust in men’s lives like nothing else can. Why? Because they expose the devil’s counterfeit for what it is – cheap and inferior.

There is an attraction a man feels for a woman of purity that goes way beyond sexual gratification. Godly sexual attraction is part of it, but it goes deeper, down to the person she is in her heart. Feminine purity calls to the masculine soul in a way that makes him want to be something more, something better, something greater than he is right now. He wants to be worthy of loving and serving her, of being her covering and protector. He realizes it would be an honor to be chosen by her.

A stark contrast exists between godly beauty and worldly beauty. There is nothing more beautiful in the world than a woman who knows with confidence that she is loved passionately both by God and by her covering, such as a husband or a father. She radiates. It is so different than the world’s version of beauty, which is based on seduction and vanity, is devoid of character, and quickly fades away. Godly beauty grows greater with time rather than diminishing.

A Dream about Wisdom

I am a dreamer. I have multiple dreams every night and always remember them when I first wake up. Occasionally I have a dream that feels significant and has a biblical message. I will share a few of these in this book. My understanding of scripture is that dreams can sometimes come from a spiritual source, such as God or the enemy. I think it is possible that one or more of the dreams I will share came from the Lord, but it also certainly possible they came from my own soul.

During one season I was frequently tempted by lust. To combat this, I began regularly reading from Proverbs. I noticed the exhortation to call Wisdom my sister and listen to her counsel regarding purity (ex. Proverbs 7:4-5, 9:13-18).

Then one night I had a dream. I was introduced to a seductive woman. When I went to shake her hand, she aggressively offered herself to me. However, I roughly pushed her aside and said, “*Sorry, I’m married.*” As I did this, I saw a godly woman who I thought of as a sister standing off to the side, watching. She was proud of me. I felt that her presence helped me resist the temptation.

As I prayed about the dream, I felt the message was that women of purity change the atmosphere around them. They empower men to step up and choose noble thoughts and noble actions. They inspire men to treat women with honor and fidelity.

Third – A Satisfying Marriage

Proverbs 5:15-19 says:

“Drink water from your own cistern and fresh water from your own well... Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth. As a loving hind and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; be exhilarated always with her love.”

God delights in passionate intimacy between two of his children who are married. The passage above attests to this, as does the entire book of Song of Solomon. Christians should be known for our esteem of sexual intimacy more than any other group since we are the ones most capable of seeing it for what it is – a wonderful gift from the Creator.

Sex as God created it is pure and shameless. It is far superior to the substitute offered by the enemy. The first time a young man sees a naked woman, the image is etched in his mind forever. Imagine if this image was his wife on their wedding night.

The world says sex is not exciting unless there is some degree of perversion in it. For some married Christians it takes years of pursuing purity to detoxify our minds from thinking about sex the way the media portrays it, but the perseverance is well worth it.

We Were Created for Monogamy

The world tries to tell people, especially men, that monogamy is not natural. When we are no longer excited by the person we are with, they say, we should find a new partner. This is a lie. God’s design is not that find a new person, but that we continually find a *new relationship* with the *same person*.

Relationships are not static. They are always changing and growing, either closer or farther apart. Intense sexual desire is a gift that drives men to pursue their wives hearts, which causes the relationship between them to grow deeper. As the relationship deepens, sexual enjoyment heightens. Emotional connection and sexual connection reinforce one another.

Sexual desire can be a tremendous source of grace during conflict. If there is a rift in a marriage, sooner or later sexual desire will become a strong motivator to do some repair work. This may seem like a questionable motive, but a spouse’s need for physical connection is valid just like the need for emotional connection is valid.

Purity and Spiritual Vision

There is link between purity and spiritual vision, which is why Jesus said in Matthew 5:8, **“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”** The passage could apply not only to seeing God in heaven after we die, but also to our spiritual vision in this life. Paul called this having **“the eyes of our hearts”** opened in Ephesian 1:18. It includes things like:

- Having and accurate perception of who God is
- Seeing others through His eyes
- Seeing sin through His eyes
- Being able to discern what He is doing in our lives and in the lives of those around us

One of the ways we guard our spiritual eyes is by guarding our physical eyes, especially when it comes to movies, television, the internet, and other forms of media. Looking at sexual immorality and other forms of evil dims our spiritual vision and makes us less able to tolerate God's presence in our lives. This is why Isaiah 33:14-15 says:

"Who among us can live with the consuming fire [God's presence]? Who among us can live with continual burning? ...He who stops his ears from hearing about bloodshed and shuts his eyes from looking upon evil."

Overcoming False Shame

While the need for men to guard their eyes cannot be overemphasized, another part of the battle against lust is recognizing when the enemy tries to heap false condemnation onto us. Once at a swimming pool I inadvertently saw a woman in a bikini that hardly covered anything at all. It wasn't on purpose and I immediately looked away without looking back. But I still felt ashamed.

I said to the Lord, *"What's wrong with me?"* Instantly I felt Him reply to my heart: *"There's nothing wrong with you. I created you to be attracted by what you just saw. The thing that's wrong is your culture, which tries to induce men to lust rather than safeguarding marriages and purity."* When the Lord spoke this, the false shame I felt immediately lifted.

There is a reason all the eternal rewards listed in Revelation 2 and 3 are for those who *overcome*. In this age, purity does not come easily or naturally. The culture, spiritual beings, and our flesh are all set against us. *Overcoming* is the only possible way to escape lust and grow in purity.

The Heart Follows the Will

In 2 Samuel 13, a man named Amnon was in love with a woman named Tamar. She was willing to marry him (vs. 13), but he didn't want to wait to have sex with her, so he forced himself on her. Afterward, verse 15 says, **"Then Amnon hated her with a very great hatred; for the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her."**

While this is an extreme example, the principle applies to countless relationships – the emotions of our hearts follow the choices of our will. The truth is, when a man uses a woman for sexual gratification, he devalues her in his heart. Or when a woman uses a man's attention

and pursuit to feed her vanity, she devalues him in her heart. This can have serious long term repercussions for their relationship.

When Jenny and I were dating, we thankfully abstained from sex, but I nevertheless chose to violate a boundary I previously set for myself. I repented after we were married, but years later God convicted me that this choice contributed to the breakdown of my marriage. It devalued our relationship in my heart, which helped me elevate my ambitions above our marriage.

A Dream about Lust and the Kingdom of God

A few years ago I had dream with three parts. In the first part, I faced a minor sexual temptation, but chose to say no. When I did this, I suddenly found myself in a small coed community of believers. We were all good friends and very joyful. The scene was full of laughter and pure conversation. I thought that it felt a little like heaven.

In the second part, I faced a stronger sexual temptation, but once again managed to say no. Suddenly I was flying over a breathtaking landscape. I felt ecstatic. This felt far more like heaven than the last scene!

In the third part, I faced the strongest sexual temptation yet, and I gave in. I woke up feeling both ashamed and disappointed that I missed out on whatever would have happened next if I had not given in. The dream was powerful message to me: The extent to which I could experience the Kingdom of God in my life was related to overcoming lust.

(God does not tempt anyone (James 1:13), but he does test us. Sometimes His tests include allowing the enemy to tempt us. One possible interpretation of this dream is that it was from the Lord, but He intermittently allowed an evil spirit or my own flesh to tempt me. Another possibility is that it originated in my own soul and contained a biblical message.)

A Nation in Danger

It is right for Christians to be righteously offended by our culture and media's satanic attack on sexuality. It is destroying families, ruining lives, damning souls, and is close to toppling our society. Sexual immorality destroys nations. It has happened many times before in history and it is happening again right now. A nation cannot survive unless the family unit remains intact and the family unit cannot survive the dismissal of all sexual moral standards.

Children today are conditioned from an early age to believe there is nothing wrong with sex outside of marriage. It is so painful to see an entire generation of precious preteens and teenagers being tricked into giving away one of the most incredible gifts they will ever receive before they are even old enough to understand what is happening. They are trading a lifetime of mature oneness for an endless string of shallow sexual relationships and painful breakups.

Virtually everything the media portrays about sex is a lie. They claim you can enjoy promiscuity with no guilt, no shame, and no consequences. There will be no damage to your character or your capacity for a committed relationship. There will be no hindrance to your ability to build a marriage and family with one person after having built a long history of intimate memories and experiences with other people. What a deception!

I recall a couple of enormously popular sitcoms in 90's. The basic message of these shows was this: *Sexual immorality is fun and harmless and marriage and divorce are trivial things*. The creator of one of the shows even publicly stated that he intended it to be a secular humanist attack on Judeo-Christian values. Nevertheless, the shows were extremely popular among Christians (myself included). Many believers still watch them regularly today and own the DVD sets. A church I was attending even frequently showed clips of one of the shows for humorous effect. Since the characters were charismatic and the story lines were clever, apparently the moral filth it promulgated could be overlooked.

I don't mean for this to sound judgmental; I am guilty myself. But I am convinced we in the church have contributed to what is happening. Many studies have shown that sexual immorality is just as prominent and accepted among those who profess to be Christians as those who don't.

We are the spiritual gatekeepers. As the church goes, so goes the nation. When we agree with Satan through our choices, it not only gives him dominion in our own lives, but there also is nothing to hinder him from fully pouring out his influence on the culture at large. It is possible that America could be severely judged for the sexually immorally content we are filling the world with unless there is heavy repentance in the church for our agreement with it.

Conclusion

One pastor said it well. When a woman came up to him and asked, *"What do you think about sex?"* he replied, *"Sex is the most wonderful thing on this earth, as long as God is in it. When the devil gets in it, it's the most terrible thing on this earth."*

Sexual desire is one of the strongest forces in life. It is something we all feel and is the center of many people's thoughts. If the church fails to recognize the power and glory of sex, the consequences are staggering. How many people has Satan claimed forever because they were unwilling to surrender their sexuality to God? How many of them might have been saved if the witness of the church convinced them that God's plan truly is superior to the enemy's? If Satan can use his counterfeit to draw so people into his kingdom, cannot God draw people with the true version when it is glorified through His people?

Next

It is so important for spouses to recognize that their marriage has an enemy. In the next chapter, we will talk about spiritual warfare and its impact on marriage.

Chapter 14 – Warfare is our Nature

The Bible uses the title “Lord of hosts” (which means “Lord of armies”) to describe God more than any other title. Similarly, Psalms and Proverbs frequently describe Him using military language. For example, He is called a fortress, a bulwark, our defense, the One who encamps around us, and the One who defeats our enemies. Obviously, warfare is one of the most important aspects of God’s nature.

Since we bear God’s image, warfare is also one of the most important aspects of *our* identities. A warrior-like approach to the enemy is integral to life as a Christian. It is impossible to significantly advance God’s kingdom without simultaneously displacing Satan’s kingdom, which he always resists. This is why Jesus gave the disciples authority over the enemy (Luke 10:19) and why Paul taught the Ephesians to use the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-17).

We are at war against myriads of incredibly wicked, invisible beings all around us. They have influence in our governments, media, economy, corporations, and every other high place in our society (ex. 1 John 5:19). But their most coveted target is the family, which is the foundation of civilization. The battle is unavoidable. The consequences are real. The casualties are eternal. Pursuing a life of active prayer, faith, and obedience is nothing if not warrior-like.

I had a conversation with a church leader who basically refused to acknowledge the relevance of spiritual warfare in his life. He said his own flesh provided enough struggle and he did not need additional help from the enemy. His statement revealed a dangerous blind spot. It does not matter whether he *needs* more help from the enemy – he *has* it – a lot of it. The very fact that he considered spiritual warfare irrelevant indicated that, at least in one area, the enemy was already winning the battle.

The Battleground of Marriage

After our relationship with the Lord, our marriage is the enemy’s primary target. This is because our marriage is meant to be our greatest source of grace and blessing. Satan knows that destroying our marriage will minimize the fruitfulness of our lives.

Evil spirits are careful, deliberate planners, which is why Paul exhorted the Corinthians not be ignorant of their schemes (2 Corinthians 2:11). Evil spirits also orchestrate setups. David portrayed them as strategically laying down traps and snares (Psalms 124:7, 142:3). Evil spirits learn our weaknesses, wounds, and vulnerabilities. They know what to suggest at the right time to incite fear, pain, or rage against our spouse. They know what thoughts to plant in our minds to cultivate bitterness or mistrust. Jesus told the disciples to be “**shrewd as serpents**” (Matthew 10:16), which means to understand how the enemy thinks and strategizes.

Part of our maturing process is that God gradually pulls His hand of protection back to allow the enemy to test us. A good parent shelters a child from evil influences while he is young, but

gradually allows a measure of exposure as he matures. Then, when he becomes an adult, he will not be godly only because he was never exposed to any other alternative, but because he is aware of the nature of sin and has grown to hate sin and love righteousness. God does likewise.

We see this in scripture. Jesus was led into the wilderness to be **“tempted by Satan for 40 days”**. A **“messenger of Satan”** tormented Paul for a time and God refused to take it away. God set a table before David **“in the presence of his enemies”**. Ephesians 6:16 implies every believer can expect to be attacked with **“flaming arrows of the evil one”**. God allowed Satan to tempt Adam and Eve in the garden. God withdrew His presence from King Hezekiah and left him vulnerable to attack in 2 Chronicles 32:31. God permitted Satan to afflict Job.

God sometimes does the same thing in our marriage. He allows us to be tested and attacked, to an extent, so we learn to choose righteousness and our marriage grows stronger. During one season of my marriage, the devil suggested a lie to me that I struggled against every single day. Finally, I asked the Lord how long He would allow the enemy to continue doing this. I felt as though He replied simply, *“For as long as it works.”* In other words, He wasn’t going to make it stop. Instead, He wanted me to mature to the point where the lie no longer had any power over me.

Warfare Scenarios

There are countless types of spiritual attacks we can encounter in our marriage. Spiritual attacks are not formulaic. They can feel heavy and oppressive, or they can feel exhilarating and enlightening. They can also feel like nothing at all, but only affect our intellectual thought patterns.

They can be overt and obvious or they can be subtle and difficult to discern. They can incite depression, shame, fear of the future, or questioning the goodness of God’s character. They can evoke spiritual pride, criticism of others, lust, or envy. Sometimes we are completely blind to an area where the enemy is manipulating us. However, God often gives our spouse discernment in areas where we are blind. Our spouse, if we are willing, may be the instrument God uses to deliver us and help us walk in freedom.

Spiritual attacks can be dealt with in different ways. In some cases, a single, direct rebuke using the name and authority of Jesus will cause the enemy to flee. Paul did this in Acts 16:18 and Jesus did it in Mark 1:25, 9:25 and Luke 4:35, 9:42. In these instances the evil spirits were manifesting overtly and visibly. However, the same principle can also apply when their presence is much more subtle.

In other cases, an attack is being allowed by God to refine us. It doesn’t help to rebuke the enemy because God is allowing him to remain. We can ask God to remove him, which He may or may not do, but one thing we should also ask for is grace to persevere for as long as the attack persists.

In other cases, the enemy has a right to continue attacking us because we are living in agreement with him. Somewhere in our lives there is an open door that we may or may not be consciously aware of. If we are unsure what the door is, we can ask the Lord and He will reveal it to us. Then we can close it through repentance.

When Peter declared that he would never fall away even if all the other disciples did (Matthew 26:33), there was pride and self-reliance in his heart, which Satan had a right to exploit. This is why Satan **“demanded permission”** to sift him like wheat (Luke 22:31), which resulted in Peter soon denying that he even knew Jesus. Peter was initially overcome by shame. He may have even contemplated walking away from his calling (John 21:1-3). However, Jesus knew Peter’s heart. He knew that Peter would eventually repent and close the door through which the enemy entered his life, which is why Jesus preemptively said to him in Luke 22:32, **“...I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”**

In the case of some attacks, we are simply invading the enemy’s territory and he inevitably defends and counterattacks. Anyone who consistently helps to lead others out of bondage will encounter opposition. Anyone who walks in his calling and anointing will necessarily spend a significant amount of time in the enemy’s presence, which is why David said in Psalm 23:5:

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil, My cup overflows.”

One way of combatting lies from the enemy is to “go in the opposite spirit”, which means to believe and act as though the opposite of what the enemy is suggesting is true. If the enemy is saying God has abandoned us, we should immediately begin thanking Him for His faithfulness. If the enemy plants thoughts of criticism or envy toward others, we should thank God for them and pray for Him to bless them.

Because the enemy opposes what God is doing, sometimes his attacks can actually help to illuminate God’s activity. For example, if the enemy is working hard to get us to hurriedly change our situation on our own initiative, even though we know God put us there, it probably means God wants us to be patient and persevere. By contrast, if the enemy is working especially hard to get us to believe a certain situation will never change, it may mean that God is planning to bring change.

Sometimes the situations in our lives can be complicated and it is unclear how the enemy is involved or how to war against him. However, God can reveal these things to us if we seek Him. The Bible promises in James 1:5, **“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”** 2 Corinthians 2:14 also promises that if we allow God to lead us, He **“...always leads us in triumph in Christ.”**

A Testimony

Once when Jenny and I were engaged, I was driving to her house to pick her up for a date. I felt happy and excited to spend time with her. Suddenly I remembered four or five ministry-related phone calls I wanted to make. Some were to make plans for a youth group I was co-leading; others were to encourage friends who were struggling with difficult trials. I began to feel anxious, knowing I wouldn't be able to complete them all before I arrived. However, I was determined to do as much as I could.

I started to make the first call... then stopped. I realized that in 30 seconds I went from being excited to see my fiancé to feeling anxious about not having enough time to complete these ministry tasks. I put the phone down and decided the calls could wait. I went back to my previous happiness and excitement. This decision didn't strike me as significant at the time. However, I think it was very significant to God and He wanted me to know it.

Later that day, for some reason, I could not stop thinking about my choice to temporarily set aside those phone calls. I couldn't shake the feeling there was something significant the Lord wanted to show me about it. I decided to ask Him. Here is how I would verbalize what I felt Him lay on my heart:

"When you rejected the enemy's suggestion in the car to make your phone calls, you said no to one of his main strategies against your relationship with Jenny."

As I thought about this and continued praying, I realized the enemy had been doing this for months. He was trying to hinder the oneness God wanted to build in our relationship by pressuring me to over-prioritize various ministry-related tasks and distracting me from my future wife.

Next

In the next chapter we will examine a marriage about which there is written more in scripture than any other. They are both known for being heroes in the faith, but they experienced some gut-wrenching failures along the way.

Chapter 15 - Sarai and Abram

This chapter is devoted to chronicling the rocky marriage between Abram and Sarai, about whom there is more written in scripture than any other married couple. For twenty-five years, their marriage experienced a difficult trial that was, in part, orchestrated by God. However, while neither partner was perfect, Abram in particular committed major failures that made the trial much more difficult than it needed to be.

Abram's Motivation

Abram was extremely spiritual-minded. He valued the calling of God so much that he completely gave his life away in pursuit of it. This is apparent for two reasons.

First, his calling was to father a nation that would not exist until long after he died. Hebrews 11:13 says that Abram died without receiving the promises God had given him. He only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.

Second, Abram spent decades wandering in the wilderness and dwelling in tents in order to pursue this calling (Hebrews 11:9). He did not live in a physical city where he might have enjoyed his vast wealth because he was pursuing a heavenly city (Hebrews 11:10). He left his home country in pursuit of a heavenly country (Hebrews 11:15-16). He considered himself a stranger and an exile on the earth, only passing through on route to his true home (Hebrews 11:13). He waited and persevered until he was 100 years old before he saw just the initial, partial fulfillment of his calling in a single child.

Abram's Failures as a Spiritual Leader

Abram's esteem for spiritual things above temporal things was noble, but it was also heavily tainted by self-preservation, and perhaps selfish ambition. This wreaked havoc on his marriage and caused Sarai inestimable pain.

In Genesis 12, when Abram journeyed to Egypt, he was afraid the men would kill him and take Sarai because she was so beautiful, so he told her to lie and say she was only his sister. He let this go so far that the Pharaoh actually took Sarai into his home as his wife. Only a miraculous intervention by God prevented the Pharaoh having relations with her.

Can you imagine how hurt and betrayed Sarai must have felt? How alone and unprotected? Clearly, Abram did not value his wife as much as his own life. Also, since this occurred shortly after Abram received God's promise to make his descendants into a great nation, Abram apparently did not think Sarai was a vital part of this promise – a mistake he would repeat multiple times.

Later in Genesis 16, Sarai said to Abram, **“Now behold, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I will obtain children through her.”** Abram instinctively knew this would be trying to fulfill God’s promise through his own striving rather than trusting Him to fulfill it in His time. Even so, he listened to Sarai’s suggestion. He slept with Hagar and she gave birth.

Afterward, even though the act was Sarai’s idea, she still sensed that Abram had wronged her. He was the leader. He could have reminded her that God’s promises are trustworthy instead of succumbing to the fear and impatience she felt in a moment of weakness. Now, not only had he again attempted to circumvent Sarai’s role in God’s promise, but he also created the conditions for jealousy and rivalry between her and her servant.

Sarai was at a breaking point. She said to Abram, **“May the wrong done me be upon you. I gave my maid into your arms, but when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her sight. May the Lord judge between you and me.”** (Genesis 16:5) Sarai had had enough. Abram’s sins were painful enough by themselves. But to make matters worse, her entire life was probably very different from what she had envisioned. Let’s consider what she had been through.

A 25 Year Marriage Trial

Abram had no doubt he was in the center of God’s will for his life. The Lord appeared to him physically or in a vision at least 4 times over a 25 year period (Genesis 12:7, 14:18, 15:1, 15:17) and clearly spoke to him on several other occasions (Genesis 12:1, 13:14, 15:4). He received powerful revelations of God’s long term plan for his family line, the nation of Israel, and the salvation of mankind. These encounters with the Lord sustained Abram and enabled him to sacrifice so much – his homeland, his friends and family, everything familiar, any hope of a normal and stable life as he wandered about in the wilderness.

What did Sarai have to sustain her? Only Abram’s claims. That’s it. As far as we know, she received no visitations from the Lord. She had no revelation about her calling. She heard nothing from God about leaving her home and family to start a new nation. All she had to go on was a conviction from God to submit to her husband’s leadership (1 Peter 3:4-6). If Abram’s faith could be compared to walking on water, then Sarai was walking on water while blindfolded.

I wonder if Sarai ever challenged and questioned Abram during those 25 years. Why shouldn’t she? In following Abram, she had to make all the same difficult sacrifices as him, but with none of the encouragement. If this was really God, why didn’t He show the same things to her so they could be in unity? As the years turned into decades, Sarai became convinced that Abram’s “promise from God” had failed. All hope of starting a family disappeared due to her barren womb and aging body, which she expressed in both Genesis 16: 2 and again in Genesis 18:12.

I imagine Sarai saying to herself:

“Look at all I’ve given up because of my husband’s foolishness. My home, my family, my country, my whole life – all because Abram claims to have this great calling and these spectacular visions from God. Well, where is this promise? Where is this new land? Where is this new nation we’re supposed to start? It’s been 25 years. Now I’m too old to have children and Abram still holds on to his dream. Nothing will convince him otherwise.”

“God, why is this happening to me? Why won’t You show Abram his deception? He only wants to serve You! Why don’t You save him from this obsession?”

Likewise, I imagine Abram saying to himself:

“For 25 years I’ve sought God with all my heart and given up everything to obey His call. Why does my own wife challenge me every step of the way? It would be so nice to have her trust and support. I always thought if I was obedient to God, unity in my marriage would come naturally, but instead it’s been the opposite. She thinks I’ve never heard from God at all, that this is all my own initiative, that I’m deceived!”

“God, if You wanted to give me this calling, why doesn’t my wife support me? Why don’t You show her I’ve been obedient to Your voice?”

Sarai’s Great Faith-Test

What neither Abram nor Sarai realized was that Sarai was being tested and prepared for her calling just as much as Abram. Only the test God designed for her was very different than his. Her test was this:

Would she trust God enough to submit to her husband even though she couldn’t be sure whether he was hearing from the Lord?

Would she trust God to protect her if Abram had drifted into presumption or self-delusion?

Would she continue following this man with such glaring character flaws and disgusting failures just because she knew in her heart the Lord wanted her to?

This was the great trial that stared Sarai in the face for 25 years. Having no confirmation her husband was really hearing from the Lord, his claims looking more doubtful every year, this mission from God, as Abram called it, was costing her dearly – costing her everything.

Abram Commission

In Genesis 17, around Abram's 100th birthday, God appeared to him. This was the moment Abram had been waiting for. It was finally time to be commissioned and see the initial fulfillment of God's promise. To commemorate the occasion, God changed Abram's name to Abraham, which means "*exalted father*".

In the Bible, *name* is often synonymous with *nature*. When God changes someone's name, it symbolizes that their nature has changed. (Other examples of this are Saul becoming Paul, Jacob becoming Israel, and Cephas becoming Peter.) Abram's nature had changed in the wilderness. He was finally ready to father God's nation.

God would not give Abram a responsibility he was not mature enough to handle. So He prepared him with long season of waiting and character growth. He even allowed the promise to appear to die so its fulfillment was totally impossible. Then, He miraculously resurrected it so Abram could experience the superiority of God's word over natural circumstances, as we see in Romans 4:

"In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations... Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb, yet with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform."

Sarai's Commission

Next, the Lord commissioned Sarai as well, saying:

"As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah [which means *princess*] shall be her name. I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people will come from her." (Genesis 17:15-16)

God changed Sarai's name to Sarah because her nature had changed too. She became "*a princess*" and "*a mother of nations*". God had prepared her for the great authority she was called to steward.

How did Abram respond to this? By saying to God, **"Oh that Ishmael might live before You!"** How incredible! With this reply, for at least the third time, Abram again tried to circumvent Sarah's role in the promises of God. What great deception he had with regard to his marriage! He was truly blind to his wife's greatness and to her calling. Now the time had come for God to open his eyes.

Abraham clearly did not understand all the pain and sacrifice Sarah had endured. Perhaps he resented her not putting more trust in him during their long journey together. However, Sarah's victory was not that she trusted Abram, but that she entrusted herself to God when she didn't know whether she *could* trust Abram. In so doing, she became a great champion in God's eyes. She is the only wife mentioned in the "Hall of Faith" in Hebrews 11. The apostle Peter called her a spiritual mother and a model to wives in every generation since (1 Peter 3:4-6). The apostle Paul even called her a symbol of the New Covenant (Galatians 4:24). Can you imagine any higher honor?

Unity at Last

After Abraham and Sarah were commissioned, things began to change in their marriage. Abraham's next visitation from the Lord included Sarah and she finally heard with her own ears the promise of the miraculous birth of their son (Genesis 18). When Sarah heard, she responded with faith, as we see in Hebrews 11:11: **"By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised."** Finally, after such a long and difficult marital season, God granted Abraham and Sarah the marital unity they always longed for.

Wouldn't it have been easier for them if God spoke to Sarai the same thing as Abram from the beginning? Of course it would have – much easier! Both of them loved God and sincerely wanted to obey him. He could have given them unity at any time, but He didn't do this for their sakes. This was their test. This was their preparation for their callings. God taught Abraham to be content only with His approval, even if all others, including his wife, doubted him. And He taught Sarai to trust in Him even if she couldn't trust her husband or even in the face of hopeless circumstances.

A Final Failure

It would be nice if the story of Abraham and Sarah's marriage ended there. However, it would not be a faithful exploration of their journey to leave out Abraham's treachery in Genesis 20.

Incredibly, shortly after Abraham and Sarah were commissioned, Abraham repeated his past sin of telling a foreign king Sarah was only his sister. Once again the king took Sarah as his wife and prepared to consummate the relationship. Once again God supernaturally intervened on her behalf because Abraham failed to cover her. Once again Abraham's old stronghold – the fear of death – prevented him from being willing to lay down his life for Sarah.

How could Abraham do this? Think of all the supernatural encounters he had experienced. Think of all he knew about the callings of his wife, his future son, and himself. The very future of humanity rested in the balance of his choices. How could he possibly allow this king to take Sarah away from him? Why did he not trust God? It seems so unthinkable.

There is no excuse, but there is an explanation. To understand why Abraham did this, we first need to recognize that the promises he received grew the longer he walked with God:

- 1) First, God said he would make Abraham a great nation (Genesis 12:2).
- 2) Then, God said he would make Abraham the father of a *multitude* of nations (Genesis 17:4).
- 3) Finally, God gave Abraham the greatest promise of all, saying his seed will possess the gate of their enemies (Genesis 22:17). This was a prophecy about the Second Coming of Christ, when the biological and spiritual descendants of Abraham, with Jesus, retake dominion of the earth and send Satan and his angels to hell (Matthew 16:18 , Revelation 20:2).

We also need to recognize that Abraham was experientially familiar with the power Satan has over mankind – the power of death (Hebrews 2:14). In Genesis 15:9-18, Abraham had a symbolic encounter with God which, according to most theologians, foreshadowed the cross and its power to save people from spiritual death. The experience terrified Abraham. Verse 12 says, “**...terror and great darkness fell upon him**”. There is nothing more horrific or frightening in the universe than the fate that awaits those who die without Christ. Abraham tasted this first-hand.

Now let’s tie this all together. Abraham once again lied about Sarah being his wife because he came under a heavy satanic attack of *fear*. This was a last ditch effort on Satan’s part to prevent the birth of the child through whom all God’s promises – including the eventual defeat of his own kingdom – would begin to be fulfilled. Abraham came under the full brunt of terror that Satan could inflict and he buckled. He gave in to self-preservation instead of standing up for his wife. This episode is a reminder that there are times when being the head of a marriage that is threatening to Satan’s kingdom is not an easy task, but requires real courage.

Next

What exactly is submission? What does it mean and what does it look like? We’ll examine this in the next chapter.

Chapter 16 – What is Submission?

What does *submission* mean? Not just in marriage, but in other contexts as well, such as the church, the workplace, or civil government? Submission is different than obedience. Submission has to do not only with outward actions, but also the heart. A submitted person has a heart-attitude that honors and respects those in authority because he understands their authority ultimately traces back to God as the Originator and they will be held accountable for how they steward it (Romans 13:1-2).

This attitude of honor is not based on whether those in authority deserve it. Since the fall, there has never been an authority figure that has not misused or abused his power in some way. Kings, presidents, employers, mothers, fathers, husbands, and church leaders have all stumbled many times and proven themselves inadequate. If imperfection disqualified a person from holding a position of authority, there would be no authority on earth. If God's command for us to submit to authority depended on whether those in authority were worthy, the command would be meaningless.

As we discussed earlier, biblical submission could be defined like this:

Submission is a heart-attitude that honors authority, obeys its legitimate commands, forgives its misuses, and sometimes respectfully declines commands that are outside of its jurisdiction to give.

The first part – the part about giving honor and obeying legitimate commands protects the heart against the sin of *rebellion*. The second part – the part about forgiving misuses and respectfully disobeying illegitimate commands – protects the heart against *bitterness*. Put them together and you have an impenetrable force-field around the one thing in life that matters most – our relationship with God. No matter how unjust or oppressive of an authority a person finds himself under, submission will render that authority powerless to harden a person's heart toward God. God's command for submission is meant for our protection. It is not oppressive, but freeing.

Submission is not weakness. In fact, it is the most powerful action a person can take in response to oppressive leadership because it invites the power of God into the situation. Submission even has the power to transform nations. An historical example of this can be seen in the life of Martin Luther King Jr.

Another example can be seen in Acts 5 when the religious leaders commanded Peter and John to cease preaching about Jesus. Peter and John disobeyed the command even though they remained submitted to the Pharisees' positions of authority in their hearts. Jesus, likewise, remained submitted to the religious and political authorities even though He disobeyed them. When they slandered, falsely accused, and persecuted Him, He never allowed any rebellion or

unforgiveness to enter His heart. When they unjustly sentenced Him to an excruciating death, He even prayed for their forgiveness while He was being executed.

Intern to Supervisor

Several years ago I worked at processing plant. Since I was only an intern, I started at the bottom. My days were spent turning wrenches, driving forklifts, and even scraping out feces from a drainage system. My boss, the president of the company, wore his emotions on his sleeve. If I made a mistake, he immediately yelled at me. He once yelled at me from across a warehouse in front of a large group of visiting executives for something I didn't even do!

A number of times I felt angry. I felt treated unfairly. I contemplated and prayed about different ways I could respond, but continued submit to his authority and show him respect. This must have made an impression because, less than a year and half later, he made me a supervisor over dozens of people. Nobody in the company had more responsibility than me. He even gave me his personal credit card and I frequently spent several thousand dollars per day on business expenses without him ever questioning me. He also began regularly asking me for input and seriously considered any advice I gave. Even though I didn't always like or agree with how he used his authority, I always honored it. In this end, this gave me far more influence than if I hadn't remained submissive.

David's Story of Submission

Keeping a submissive heart while under unjust authority is how some of God's greatest leaders have been shaped. There is no better example of this than David. His submission to King Saul's authority was unbelievable.

When Saul became embittered against David and decided to kill him, David chose to continue serving him and ministering to him (1 Samuel 18-19). When Saul pursued David in the wilderness, David could easily have killed him, elevating himself to king. Instead, he refused saying, **"The Lord forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed."** (1 Samuel 24 & 26) Finally, when David learned of Saul's death, he mourned, wept, and fasted for him. Then he ordered that the man whom he believe killed Saul be put to death, even though he said Saul was in agony and specifically asked the man finish him off. David said to the man, **"Your blood is on your head, for your mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the Lord's anointed.'"** (2 Samuel 1:16)

Saul murdered 85 priests in his obsessive pursuit of David (1 Samuel 22:18). He only cared about preserving his own throne. He even sought counsel from demons so he could be victorious in war (1 Samuel 28). Yet David honored and respected Saul's authority to the very end. Why? Because David wasn't honoring Saul's choices or his character; he was honoring the anointing of the Lord upon him. He knew that no matter how shamefully it is stewarded, the anointing itself is still worthy of honor.

David's commitment to submit enabled God to entrust him with more authority than Saul ever dreamed of. David was not only Israel's greatest king, but he established the spiritual foundation for the throne that Jesus Christ will sit upon forever. Jesus is David's successor! Isaiah 9:6-7 says:

"For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders... There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore."

In God's kingdom, sometimes the reason He puts us under authority is because He is preparing to exalt us. It is a test. If we can submit to the authority of another, serving as unto the Lord rather than men, we prove ourselves trustworthy to be given our own authority. The more difficult the process is, the greater the authority God's is preparing us to steward.

What is the Authority of a Husband?

As I said earlier, having authority means different things in different contexts. For example, church leaders have authority to teach, comfort, or rebuke in a church context. Civil rulers have authority to punish evil if it violates someone's life or liberty or property. Parents have authority to teach and discipline children.

The Greek word used for authority in scripture does not only mean the power to make someone do something; it can also just mean grace or anointing from God to do something you're called to do. Mathew 7:29 says Jesus *taught* with authority. In 2 Corinthians 13:10 Paul said God gave him authority for *building up* the Corinthian church.

So the real question is – what type of authority does the Bible give a husband? I believe husbands have authority to *love, serve, protect, provide, and lead by example*.

Some have interpreted Ephesians 5:22-25 to mean that husbands can give their wives commands since Jesus gives commands to the church. But wait a minute. Does a husband literally die on a cross for the sins of his wife? Or will a wife appear before the judgment seat of her husband after she dies? Of course not. Obviously, the marriage metaphor has limits.

To understand what these limits are, we should examine portions of scripture where Christ is specifically portrayed as a husband, or where the Father is portrayed as a husband to Israel, or other passages that speak specifically about godly marriage. Here are several examples: Ephesian 5:25-33, Isaiah 54:5-8, Hosea 2:14-23, Revelation 19:7-9, Isaiah 62:4-5, Song of Solomon, Jeremiah 31:32, Ezekiel 16:8-14, Ruth 4-5, 1 Peter 3:7, Colossians 3:19, 1 Corinthians 11: 3, and 1 Timothy 5:8. When I read at these and other passages, I see the Bible giving husbands authority to *love, serve, protect, provide, and lead by example*. By contrast, whenever Jesus is depicted as giving commands, it is usually in the role of a king, a judge, a master, or a creator – not a husband. Those metaphors don't apply to marriage.

A husband can *remind* his wife of God's commands in scripture (and a wife can do likewise for her husband), but this is very different from giving his own commands. He could also *ask* her to follow his lead in a particular situation, which does carry weight if he is truly motivated by a desire to serve or protect her. However, in my view he has no biblical authority to *order* her to follow him.

Since husbands do not have authority to give commands to their wives, we might define the submission of wife like this:

Submission is a heart-attitude of a wife that honors her husband's calling to love, serve, protect, provide and lead their family, forgives him when he falls short this calling, and respectfully declines commands (or force, control, etc...) since they are not within his jurisdiction to give.

I recently listened to a Christian radio broadcast about headship and submission. The pastor said he heard about a marriage in which the husband physically beat his wife while quoting Ephesians 5:22 and demanding that she submit to him. I felt sick to my stomach as I listened. Who can imagine all the horrendous abuses that have taken place, and are taking place, supposedly in the name of biblical submission? Is it any wonder that many wives feel fear or skepticism about this passage? Perhaps a proper interpretation could help both men and women better understand God's beautiful design for the single most important human relationship.

The Early Trials of Mary's Marriage

Another biblical example of submission that always strikes me is Mary, the mother of Jesus. Three times in Matthew 2, Joseph uprooted his new wife and baby to move to a completely unknown region because God spoke to him in a dream. This would be difficult on newlyweds in any generation, but moving was especially difficult in those days. Most people never went more than twenty miles from their birthplace during their entire lives. There were no freeways or moving trucks – just camels and feet.

Whenever I read this passage, I can't help wondering if Mary ever felt indignant or frustrated that God kept speaking only to Joseph about such major decisions that affected their whole family. After all, Mary certainly knew the Lord's voice. She had been visited by an angel. She had been given a special role in God's salvation plan. She had been entrusted with the responsibility of raising God's own Son. So why was He only speaking to her husband about their futures?

Perhaps Mary was tested in this way because of her maturity and strength of character. Not every woman could endure something like this, but God decided Mary could be trusted with the honor of going through this difficult trial.

Also, perhaps God was preparing her. Submitting to Joseph's authority about such major decisions in those early years prepared her to remain submitted to God's authority in the years ahead. Mary was completely inadequate for her calling – raising the Son of God to maturity. She would never be able to do this even remotely well through her own wisdom or sincere efforts. She had to be completely dependent on the Holy Spirit's leading. She could not do things her own way; it had to be the Lord's way. Faithfully submitting to an imperfect husband would prepare her to submit to God's authority when she did not always like or understand what He wanted her to do.

A Testimony of Headship and Submission

Here is one final story of headship and submission I recently heard a pastor share. He and his wife had been saving for three years for a down payment on a new house. When they finally saved enough, they went house-hunting and quickly found their dream home. However, shortly before they were about to make the down payment, the husband felt the Lord speak to Him to use that money to fund a new ministry in their city instead.

The husband shared this with his wife, but said he wouldn't do it if she wasn't in agreement. She sought the Lord for a couple of weeks. She didn't hear anything specific, but felt impressed to trust that her husband was hearing from the Lord. She decided to support him in giving away the money.

This was a heroic sacrifice by the wife. It was also wise, loving leadership by the husband. His wife would never have had the *opportunity* to be heroic if he had tried to make the decision unilaterally. Putting the outcome into her hands gave her the chance to grow in Christ-likeness. This is the sign of true leadership – helping others to become like Christ.

Next

Our culture increasingly celebrates homosexuality and transgenderism. What is God's perspective of this trend? We will discuss this topic in the next chapter.

Chapter 17 – Homosexuality and Transgenderism

It is ironic that our culture frames the choice to pursue homosexuality or transgenderism as being true to one's self when in reality the only way a person can experience his or her true sexual identity is by growing in oneness with someone of the opposite sex. Perhaps the root deception underlying homosexuality and transgenderism is a failure to recognize the incredible weight of glory and honor that God has ascribed both to masculinity and to femininity, which includes sexuality and romantic attraction. As one pastor said, if you fully knew all that God had in mind for you, you would never want to be anyone else.

A man can never be truly complete without a woman and a woman can never be truly complete without a man, except when called to singleness or seasons of singleness. Adam walked in the Garden of Eden in God's presence and had perfect communion with Him, yet God still said he was **"alone"** without his wife and this was **"not good"**. For those who believe God's word, it is incredibly foolish to still pursue homosexuality. It's like saying to God, *"I don't need your provision for me. I'll seek completion and companionship my own way."*

For some people, it feels easier to pursue oneness with someone of the same sex because they are similar in the way they think and feel. They are easier to understand; they are less challenging and frustrating. However, that lack of difference is precisely why they can never complete one another.

There is something beautiful about pursuing a lifetime of oneness with someone so different – not only sexually, but emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. The opposite sex adds something to our lives that someone of the same sex never could. They awaken parts of us that otherwise lay dormant. They help us discover who God created us to be. A man discovers his masculinity and a woman's discovers her femininity when they learn how to dwell together in intimacy.

Medical science confirms male/female differences. The hormone/chemical makeup in a woman's brain and body has been linked to traits like sensitivity and compassion, while a man's makeup has been linked to traits like daring, competition, physical strength, and libido.

It's true that some women are stronger than the average man and some men are more sensitive than the average woman. However, even if a woman has an unusually strong personality or body, it doesn't make her any less female. Likewise, being unusually sensitive does not make a man any less male. He may be better matched with a strong wife so they balance and refine each other, but he is still created to be sexually, soulfully, and spiritually compatible with a woman.

A Taboo Topic

Why would a person's sense of identity contradict his biology (transgenderism)? Or why would a person's sexual desire contradict his biology (homosexuality)?

If a man's biology is designed for sexual interaction with a woman, why would his emotions or psychology cause him to desire another man? Even secular humanists should be able to acknowledge that this question is rational and worth exploring. But for some reason, it is mostly taboo in public discourse.

In some cases, the question is taboo because LGBT individuals have been mistreated, so the question feels insensitive or judgmental. In other cases, however, the unwillingness to consider the question reveals that people are not interested in what is truly best or healthy for the LGBT individuals, but are more interested in advancing a political agenda. If they really cared about the person, would they not be open to considering the possibility of an unhealthy root, at least in some cases?

Here are some questions worth considering of an LGBT person:

- Is the person's homosexuality or transgenderism based partly on encouragement from a friend, mentor, or cultural influences or is it based purely on his or her own convictions?
- Did he or she feel attracted to the same sex as early as he or she could remember or did it arise later?
- Was it a conscious choice or was it involuntary?
- Could the same-sex attraction be related to a premature, unhealthy, or abusive introduction to sex?
- Could the same-sex attraction be related in any way to a painful emotional wound?
- If there is an unhealthy root, what would healthy sexuality look like for him or her?

Again, these should be fair and reasonable questions to consider, yet they are largely off limits in the public square. Recently a well-known celebrity said on a talk show that becoming a lesbian was a conscious choice for her rather than an involuntary compulsion. She was just being honest. Nevertheless, she was immediately lambasted by various gay rights groups for her "disparaging" and "traitorous" remarks.

To say transgenderism / homosexuality could be rooted in cultural influences or emotional wounds is considered hateful by some secular humanists. This is because the premise of their worldview is that there is no inherent truth or morality with regard to sexual identity or orientation. However, in a worldview where a loving God created men, women, sex, and marriage, it can be helpful or loving to say such things if it is done with humility and gentleness.

We Are All Deceived

Deception involves anything that it is a distortion of how God sees us. Each of us has some amount of deception. For example, every time we internalize pride or rejection, we are deceived. If we think (even subconsciously) we are more important because of our intelligence or wealth or reputation, we are deceived. If we think (even subconsciously) we are worthless and unlovable because of past mistakes or abusive treatment, we are deceived.

It doesn't matter how strong the emotions are or how deeply they resonate, they still do not equal truth. In the same way, deception can affect a person's sexual identity or orientation. Even if a man sincerely, deeply feels he was meant to be a woman or was meant for sexual intimacy with other men, it is still a deception.

No matter how much a man feels like a woman, there is DNA in every cell of his body that says he is a male. Likewise, no matter how much desire he feels for other men, he is designed at the cellular level for sexual compatibility with a woman. If society, friends, or family members encourage him to embrace the contradiction he feels without ever questioning the wisdom of it, is this really the best, healthiest thing they can do for him?

How Romantic / Sexual Desires Are Formed

Human beings are relational creatures. From birth, we crave affirmation. We long for physical and emotional affection. It's like food to our souls. Without it we starve. We go in search for it wherever we can find it.

A child needs nonsexual physical and emotional affection from his or her parent of the same sex. This is a major part of what enables him or her to develop a sexual identity and feel secure in being a man or woman. When they don't experience this affection, the ongoing need for it can influence their sexual desires as they mature.

A child also needs warmth and affection from his or her parent of the opposite sex so they can experience the opposite sex as being safe and trustworthy. If they don't receive this, it could hinder them from developing sexual/romantic attraction toward the opposite sex as they move toward adulthood.

Feelings of romance and attraction begin forming early. If we felt perfectly loved and secure in our homes, we more easily choose healthy relationships. However, if we did not receive the love we craved, or if we carry wounds from parental abuse or neglect, we might subconsciously pursue relationships to fill that void. We might try to somehow fix the past. Unhealthy relationship patterns, whether heterosexual or homosexual, are often people's attempts to meet a legitimate need for affection as best as they know how.

Here are some examples:

- A woman named Karen longed for warmth and affection from her alcoholic mother but instead was regularly abused, both physically and emotionally. She became a lesbian in her early adulthood. Could the two be related?
- A woman named Helen was in an abusive heterosexual marriage that eventually fell apart. Due to the pain and trauma of that experience, intimacy with a man felt scary and she seemed to find comfort through becoming a lesbian.

- An especially sensitive man named Harold was rarely shown physical affection from his father. He also became sexually active with peers at an extremely early age, beginning in grade school. He initially felt attracted to both guys and girls, but eventually gravitated exclusively toward homosexuality in early adulthood. Could his homosexuality be related to the lack of affection from his father or to experiencing sexual intimacy so early before he could really comprehend the impact of his choices?
- A boy named Hector also had a sensitive demeanor. However, the type of manhood modeled by his father never expressed emotion or vulnerability. When Hector became an adult, he desperately wanted to express his sensitive side but felt incapable of doing so as a man. He eventually concluded he must really be a woman.
- A woman named Chelsey was raised by an abusive single father who committed suicide when she was in high school. She felt no trust toward men and felt much more comfortable expressing sexual desire toward other women.

Are Helen, Karen, Harold, Hector, and Chelsey best helped by encouraging them to continue in their same-sex attraction / transgenderism without questioning whether it is built on a healthy foundation? Would they benefit from a compassionate friend, mentor, or counselor helping them honestly process through the pain they experienced and asking how it affects their romantic attachments and sense of identity today?

A Common Objection

Some people feel attracted to the same sex from as early as they can remember. This often leads people to ask, *how can it be wrong if it began so early and involuntarily?*

It's true that some people are more prone to same sex attraction because of personality or genetic factors. However, personality or genetic factors can also make some people more prone to heterosexual lust, pride, anger, violence, or any number of other traits.

Just because a trait begins early or comes naturally does not mean it cannot be immoral. The first time I told a lie or stole something, I was about four years old. Many people I've talked to say the same thing. So lying and theft began early and naturally for me, but that doesn't mean it can't be immoral.

The Church's Attitude

Perhaps we in the church share some responsibility for our society's inability to have open, honest dialogue about the root causes of homosexuality and transgenderism. Perhaps we have contributed to the LGBT community becoming defensive about their same-sex attraction / transgenderism and embracing the lie that it is part of their core identity.

In an attempt to promote the Christian worldview of sex and marriage, many prominent voices have shown zero compassion for those who are in bondage to homosexual / transgender strongholds. Homosexuality and transgenderism, like many things the Bible calls sin, is often lost people's sincere attempt to find fulfillment or relief from pain the best way they know how. They are not being willfully immoral. They don't know God so they are easily swept up in the current of the culture. Yet we in the church have treated them like enemies. Accusatory, condemning language by Christians has greatly helped to advance the LGBT political agenda. A major Christian leader blaming 9/11 on homosexuals just after the event may have helped the LGBT agenda gain sympathetic supporters more than any public statement made in the last fifty years.

Lately, there seems to be more compassion and wisdom in Christian churches, radio, and television for how to engage the homosexual community. This is encouraging. Now, the more successful trap of the enemy may be to go to the opposite extreme, getting Christians to abandon a biblical perspective altogether. Some major Christian leaders and denominations are now claiming homosexuality and transgenderism are acceptable in God's sight. In such cases, the church is using its spiritual authority to help the enemy further entrap the people we should be interceding for.

Leviticus 18:22, Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9, and 1 Timothy 1:10 all clearly identify homosexuality as sin. Some people, Christians and non-Christians, claim that Jesus never said homosexuality is a sin, but this is not true. Jesus listed *fornication* among the various sins that defile people in Matthew 15:19 and Mark 7:21. The word used for fornication refers to all sex outside of marriage, and Jesus plainly defined marriage as being between a male and female Matthew 19:4-6.

God in Pursuit

A man named James grew up in an evangelical Christian home and felt attracted to the same sex from an early age. When he told his family as a young adult, they angrily disowned him and cut off all contact, causing him deep pain. He feels unspeakably relieved and affirmed by the movement in our culture toward acceptance of homosexuality. I wonder how his life might have been different if, as a young man, he felt loved by the Christians in his life, even knowing they believed the same-sex attraction he felt was not what God intended for him.

Christians building friendships with LGBT individuals should not initially worry about making their beliefs known. That may come in time if the relationship deepens. Unconditional acceptance is the foundation of trust. People need to know it is safe to be authentic without feeling condemned. If trust is built first, we will have authority and credibility to honestly share our convictions if the subject comes up later.

We should be gentle and sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Only He knows what someone will be able to receive. Only He knows what will cause someone to dig his heels in and become defensive. We should be patient. It can be a years-long or decades-long process during which God works

on someone in this area. We may never personally see any positive results. We may be just one of many believers God uses in His pursuit an individual's heart over time.

Satan loves to inflict pain on the heart of God by teaching men and women to reject the sexual identities He lovingly created them with. He tells them things like, *"This is who you really are. This is your true identity."* These are very powerful and persuasive lies that can deeply resonate with people feeling same-sex attraction or transgender emotions. Only the Holy Spirit, who is filled with love and compassion for that individual, can expose such statements as the lies they are. Only the power of prayer can soften his or her heart to be willing to hear the truth and repent. It is a true miracle when a person repents from homosexuality or transgenderism, but it happens every day because God loves them and He is able to deliver them.

The Condition of Our Culture

Our culture has become so perverse that children are defiled from early ages. One in three girls and one in six boys are sexually abused before the age of 18, according to some studies. It is not uncommon for junior high and grade school children to experiment with various forms of perversion. Our society celebrates this and encourages them to openly declare their homosexuality or transgenderism in public schools. Young children are portrayed as being homosexual on popular sitcoms.

My wife knew a woman whose eight-year-old son expressed a desire to play with dolls. When the woman asked the Lord about this, she sensed Him reply, *"Your son is in touch with his father-side."* Looking through a lens of innocence, this statement seems so obvious and intuitive. But our culture is so perverse and hyper-sexualized that the immediate reaction of most people would be to think this eight-year-old boy must be homosexual.

It is not uncommon for youth to have passing thoughts or feelings of same-sex attraction at some point during development, even if only out of curiosity. However, we live in such a sexually-charged atmosphere that youth feel incredible pressure to build their entire identities around their sexual feelings. In past generations, what would have been fleeting thoughts or curiosities are encouraged to be taken as firm evidence of full-fledged homosexuality or transgenderism.

My wife earned her master's degree in Marriage and Family Therapy from a secular university. In one of her classes, a visiting instructor actually encouraged therapists to ask their grade-school clients, *"Do you feel like a boy or a girl today?"* Then the therapist was to treat and speak to the child according to his response, and encourage his teachers and peers to do the same, regardless of whether it was true! How confusing and damaging! How cruel!

Children do not automatically know what it means to be a man or woman. They need role models to teach them. However, instead of affirming their true identity, deceived people today are proclaiming that sexual identity is relative, fluid, and ultimately meaningless!

Examples like this are signs of a civilization that may be on the verge of collapse. Only revival can save us. Only God and the restoration of His design for family and sexual identity offer hope for America. The family is the most basic building block of civilization. If it loses its definition, everything else that holds society together can quickly erode.

Next

In the next chapter we will return to the topic of spiritual warfare. We'll look at three profound passages and examine their implications for marriage.

Chapter 18 – Three Passages Related to Marriage and Warfare

In this chapter we will examine three insight-filled passages related to marriage and warfare. The first passage gives an especially dramatic picture of Satan's war against marriage. In the Acts 10, Peter fell into a trance and saw the following:

"...the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. A voice came to him, 'Get up, Peter, kill and eat!' But Peter said, 'By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean.' Again a voice came to him a second time, 'What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.'" (Acts 10: 11-15)

We know from what followed after the trance that God was restoring the biblical truth that His salvation plan included the Gentiles, which the Jews had lost sight of (see Acts 11:18). But what did this vision actually communicate? Let's take a look at the symbolism.

- The *sheet* here symbolized *marital intimacy*. Peter would have been familiar with a sheet representing marital oneness since it was used for evidence of sexual consummation in his culture (Deuteronomy 22:17). God was showing Peter that Christ's bride, the church, included gentiles even though gentiles were still considered unclean by the Jews.
- The unclean *four-footed animals*, *crawling creatures*, and *birds* in the sheet symbolized the *demonic realm*. Each of these types of animals in different places of scripture represents the demonic (four-footed animals, ex. Psalm 74:19; crawling creatures, ex. Luke 10:19; birds, ex. Matt 13: 4, 19)
- God's *command to kill and eat* symbolized the *Jewish church's mandate* to go into the gentile world and attack the evil strongholds that were keeping them in bondage. Another example of delivering people from bondage being compared to *food* can be found in John 4:34.

This is a startling picture. Jesus longed for intimacy with His bride, the gentile church, but standing in the way of that intimacy were multitudes of demonic creatures that had to be killed first. Nevertheless, Jesus was uncompromising in His resolve that Peter attack and kill them.

This picture applies to individual marriages as well. There is no fiercer battleground in all of humanity than marriage because there is none more foundational to God's purposes. Marriage is the primary picture God has given the world to understand how Jesus relates to His people, which is why the enemy hates it so vehemently. A single Christ-centered marriage has the power to touch countless people around it and bear tremendous fruit that can only be fully accounted for in eternity.

1 Corinthians 11

The second passage we'll look at is 1 Corinthians 11:1-16. In a nutshell it says that, while praying or prophesying, a woman's head needs to be covered and a man's head needs to be uncovered. This may sound strange and legalistic, but when we dig deeper, the passage contains profound spiritual wisdom. Let's see if we can make sense of it.

It's a Tradition

Paul starts out the passage by saying this is a **"tradition"** (vs. 2), not a doctrine or a law. Therefore, it should be interpreted similarly to other passages in the Bible that describe symbolic traditions. The important part is not the outward action, but the underlying principle it points to.

It's about Marriage

Next, in verse 3, Paul gives the context for the tradition, saying, **"But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ."** So the context is marital responsibilities and authority structure.

The Head Covering is a Symbol

Next let's look at the symbol used in this tradition – the head covering. What does it represent? This is explained in verse 10: **"Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels."** The angels Paul mentions here are not holy angels; they are fallen angels. Therefore, the head covering represents the woman being under the authority of someone who is responsible for protecting her against spiritual attack – her husband.

Paul wanted women to wear a symbol of their husband's authority to protect them while praying or prophesying because praying and prophesying are acts of spiritual warfare. They are crossing over into enemy territory and plundering his camp. The enemy takes this seriously and sometimes attempts some form of backlash.

A woman wearing a head covering meant that she was not alone. Her prayers and prophetic utterances were acts of marital unity. She was under her husband's covering who was in turn under Christ's covering (symbolized by his *uncovered* head being exposed to heaven above). Therefore, they could go together into the enemy's territory with boldness because they were properly aligned and protected under God's power. This is part of why 1 Peter 3:7 says to husbands, **"...show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered."** When there is not a proper aligning of authority and protection, the enemy can more easily oppose our prayers.

The passage says the man is the head of the woman because the husband is the primary gatekeeper of his family. In our culture, there is confusion about the proper roles of men and

women in marriage. However, when God, angels, and demons look at a family, they have no confusion at all about who carries the lion's share of the authority. They *feel* it. They know without question the husband has preeminence over the spiritual atmosphere of the home. His prayers, faith, and obedience invite the presence of God into his home while his lack of these things lays a welcome mat for the demonic realm.

Calling Your Wife Your Sister

Abraham's greatest failure in marriage was twice telling foreign kings that Sarah was his sister (Genesis 12 and 20). This was a half-truth since she actually *was* his sister (Genesis 20:12), but he neglected to mention she was also his wife because of fear. This is a picture of how a husband can sometimes treat his wife as only a sister in Christ – as an equal in their families' battle against the enemy – rather than taking responsibility to lead and protect her in the fight.

Women sometimes struggle with fear more than men. The enemy knows this and tries to exploit it. He tries to paralyze women with fear for their children's safety, fear of letting people down, fear of not being provided for, etc... Men are meant to cover and encourage their wives in this battle. This is why a woman's command to not be **"frightened by any fear"** goes hand in hand with a husband's command to live with his wife **"in an understanding way, as with someone weaker"** (1 Peter 3:6-7).

The Last Part of 1 Corinthians 11

Next, Paul says, **"For a man... is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man."** Notice it doesn't say woman is the *image* of man – Genesis 1:27 says both men and women bear *God's* image. It only says she is the *glory* of man. In other words, she is the higher, more glorious part of mankind. This goes back to what we discussed earlier about women being, in a sense, a higher order of creation because they reflect the beauty and relational nature of God.

Who is usually considered more important, the one who protects or the one who is protected? Who is more important, the soldiers or the king they protect? Who is more important, the secret service agents or the President they protect? Well then, who is more important, the husband or the wife he protects?

Finally Paul says:

"For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake... However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God." (vs. 7-9, 11-12)

Remember, men reflect the building, protecting nature of God. However, building and protecting are not an end to themselves. They are only valuable and meaningful if they are

performed in service of something greater. God created the **“woman for the man’s sake”** because his masculine nature needed a purpose to serve other than himself. He needed someone more valuable than himself to honor and protect. He needed someone more important than himself to serve.

Women reflect the beautiful, relational nature of God. Beauty and relationships *are* an end to themselves. However, without protection, beauty and relationships are defenseless. When God created Adam and Eve, the universe was divided. Satan and his angels hated God, hated His creation, and wanted to destroy it. This is why the passage says, **“...neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.”** We need each other to fully reflect the image of God. We need each other to build a kingdom that has purpose and beauty. And we need each other to wage war and overcome evil.

Elijah’s Comforter

The last passage we’ll look at is about Elijah – a man who probably wasn’t even married. However, one story from his life always reminds me of the power of a spouse to bring encouragement and hope during a time of heavy spiritual attack.

In 1 Kings 19, a three and a half year drought, brought on by Elijah’s prayers, finally came to an end. Just before it ended, Elijah called down fire from heaven in front of the entire nation of Israel and oversaw the slaughter of 400 of Jezebel’s priests who had been leading Israel into demon-worship.

Immediately after this great victory, Elijah fled into the wilderness fearing for his life because Jezebel promised to kill him. On the surface, this was not a rational response. Why would Elijah be afraid of this woman after such a spectacular demonstration of God’s power? However, this was not a normal kind of fear Elijah was feeling – it was satanic backlash. Elijah came under such heavy spiritual oppression that he felt he couldn’t go on. He asked God to take his life.

However, notice what happened next. When Elijah woke up, an angel of the Lord was physically present with him, touching him. The angel also prepared a meal of baked bread cakes and a jar of water for him. The angel spoke to him, encouraging him to eat. Elijah ate, drank, and lay down to sleep again. Then the same thing happened a second time. This time, while touching him, the angel spoke what appeared to be words of empathy and tenderness: **“Arise, eat, because the journey is too great for you.”**

Did not this angel comfort Elijah exactly as a wife would have? The angel *touched* him, *cooked* for him, and *spoke tenderly* to him. The comfort and sustenance Elijah received from that encounter sustained him for the next forty days.

I remember once feeling especially overwhelmed by the enemy’s presence in my life. I wanted to curl up into a ball and escape. Sometimes spending time alone with God can be of comfort in a situation like this, but not every time. Sometimes it makes all the difference to have someone

physically present who can touch gently and speak softly. When my wife put her arms around me and spoke encouraging words that day, I could never remember feeling more comforted.

Perhaps Elijah was not called to be married, so God supernaturally provided the comfort a wife might have added to him in his hour of darkness. But, for me, this story resonates deeply of the power of a spouse to be a physical vessel of God's tenderness and compassion when we feel like permanently retreating from a spiritual battle or come under heavy oppression.

Next

Many Christians are familiar with the metaphor of the church being Christ's body. But less familiar is the metaphor that a wife is her husband's body. What does this metaphor mean and what does it look like? We'll find out in the next chapter.

Chapter 19 –A Wife is Her Husband’s Body

Just as the church is a metaphor Jesus’ body, (1 Corinthians 12:12-13), the Bible also draws a parallel between a wife and her husband’s body. Ephesians 5:28-30 says:

“So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies... for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body.”

Just as Jesus accomplishes His will through the church, many of the greatest works and godly dreams a man is meant to accomplish in his life are actually meant to be accomplished *through* his wife.

Think for moment about how Jesus and the church function. Jesus is the Head. He casts the overall vision for His family (through the Word, the Great Commission, and the Holy Spirit). His bride, the church, is then responsible for carrying it out. However, she continually consults with Him and asks for help through prayer.

In the same way, a husband is the head of the home. He is responsible for casting an overall vision for His family’s spiritual growth. However, the wife (typically) is primarily responsible for carrying out the daily routine and practical details in the home. However, she regularly consults with her husband and asks for help as needed.

Motherhood and Salvation

1 Timothy 2:15 says, **“But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.”** The word translated **“preserved”** in the NASB is translated **“saved”** in several other versions and is the same Greek word typically used for eternal salvation.

Do you remember I wrote in an earlier chapter that a husband’s **“crown”** is his wife and that he needs her to fulfill his calling? Do you remember I said he is more vulnerable to the enemy and prone to deception if he does not cover her, serve her, and listen to her input? Well, 1 Timothy 2:15 continues this logic by moving to the next level of authority in God’s hierarchy for family. According to the passage, a woman’s children are not just her crown; they are her *salvation*! Just like a man *needs* his wife, a woman *needs* her children to become who she is called to be. She will be more vulnerable to the enemy and prone to deception if she does not cover, serve, and lead them.

It’s true that some women are called to singleness and/or childlessness. However, if a woman chooses childlessness not because of a calling but because she esteems our culture’s family-hostile values more than God’s values, this is dangerous indeed. The same is true of a mother who neglects her children or abdicates her responsibility to others.

This can apply to fathers as well. The truth is that we need our children as much as they need us. In our flesh we gravitate toward self-centeredness, but parenthood teaches us to put others first. Women were created to raise children. God releases grace for personal transformation when we do what we were created for. However, if we turn away from it, that grace may not come any other way.

The Empty Nest Years

When children grow up and leave the home, it can be an invitation for a woman to enter her most fruitful season. In one sense, everything in her life up to this point has prepared her for it. There is a reason women typically go through a much longer waiting / training period than men before becoming fully devoted to their outside-the-home callings. God often intends to entrust them with more influence than their husbands. This does not necessarily mean her influence will be more visible, but it may be more impactful. Even influence exercised privately through prayer can impact an entire church, city, or nation.

There is character-shaping power in motherhood. The patience and perseverance required to raise godly children is better training than any seminary. When an empty nest season comes, a man may need to take a step back from his own pursuits to help launch his wife as she discovers the ministry God has spent more than half a lifetime preparing her for.

Hope for the Barren?

What about women who long to become mothers but are never given the chance because of life circumstances? Does the Bible offer any words of solace?

I've often pondered Psalms 113:9, which says, **"He makes the barren woman abide in the house as a joyful mother of children."** To me, this verse clearly has a kingdom age context because the verses just before it describe the resurrection and exaltation of saints to positions of authority over the earth: **"He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes, with the princes of His people."** The chapter also describes the Lord as being established **"high above all nations"**, which will be overtly fulfilled during the millennial kingdom.

Think of all the children throughout world history that died prematurely and went to heaven because they were not old enough to be held accountable for choosing or rejecting the Lord. Will their mental and emotional development instantly advance to that of an adult when they arrive in heaven, or do they still undergo a maturation process and require adult nurturers? At the resurrection, will they be given physical bodies corresponding to the age they died or will they be given adult bodies? Also, is it possible at the second coming there will be countless orphaned children on earth who survived the chaos of the last days and need resurrected saint nurturers to help raise them? I don't know the answer to any of these questions with certainty,

but Psalm 113:9 seems to give strong hope to childless women who might otherwise fear they lost their only chance for motherhood.

Next

In the next chapter, we will examine the life of a woman who I believe is one of the greatest saints in scripture.

Chapter 20 – The Greatest Woman in Scripture

After writing the last chapter, an example of godly femininity kept coming to mind that I felt compelled to write about. She also serves as an example to men. I'm talking about Mary Magdalene.

Mary Magdalene was the feminine embodiment of the truth, there is no fear in love. Fear is one of the most controlling forces in life – such as the fear of having things exposed that we are ashamed of or the fear of being ridiculed or rejected. Many people carefully arrange their entire lives to avoid facing such fears. Yet virtually every single time Mary is mentioned in scripture she is overcoming these fears because of her unstoppable drive to be near Jesus and express her love for Him. I am convinced Mary's position in eternity will be one the greatest of anyone's in scripture, including the apostles and prophets. Let's look at her 4 primary appearances in scripture.

Exposing Her Sin

In Luke 7 Jesus dined with a Pharisee named Simon who invited Him to his home. In the middle of the meal, a woman who was known to be a sinner, perhaps a prostitute, came into Simon's home. She anointed Jesus' feet with perfume and wiped them with her hair as she wept with brokenness over her sins. Scholars point out that we don't know for sure whether this was Mary Magdalene. However, this act bears a striking resemblance to Mary anointing Jesus just before His crucifixion. Plus, like this woman, Mary Magdalene came from a sordid past, having been delivered by Jesus from seven demons (Luke 8:2). Finally, at the end of the passage, Jesus identifies this woman by her immense love for Him, which is what Mary Magdalene is known for throughout the gospels. Therefore, it is not surprising that many Bible teachers believe this was indeed Mary Magdalene at the time of her conversion.

Imagine how vulnerable and embarrassing this act would have been for this woman if she had been self-aware... weeping uncontrollably and wiping Jesus' feet while everyone just stared at her silently. To add to it, she was in the presence of a well-known spiritual leader in her community who she probably knew condemned her. Yet, she somehow didn't care. She was so intent on expressing her brokenness to Jesus that she abandoned every semblance of discretion.

The single most destructive type of fear that plagues the human race, including the church, is the fear of having our sin exposed. This is the fear that keeps us hiding from God, buried under guilt, compelled to perform religious works to appease our consciences. However, the most foundational form of courage is the willingness to expose our sin, before God and others, so we can be set free. Mary, if it was her, embodied this courage. She did the opposite of what Adam did in the Garden and what mankind has instinctively done ever since. Instead of hiding from God because of her shame, she actively sought Him out and voluntarily exposed it.

Simon the Pharisee did not understand what was happening. At the same moment the woman was being set free from bondage, Simon manifested his bondage. He began to criticize her in his heart for being a sinner. Jesus, knowing his thoughts, came to her defense, saying **“Her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much.”**

Sitting At Jesus’ Feet

In Luke 10, Mary and Martha welcomed Jesus and His followers into their home. This wasn’t an ordinary occasion – it was the biggest event in the history of the homestead. Their large group of guests included some of the most famous people in the nation – Jesus and His disciples. And it’s possible that *many* more of Jesus’ followers were present since the seventy he sent out to various cities had just returned to debrief with Him.

What an incredible burden of hospitality! Imagine the pressure and anxiety that Martha must have felt, and that Mary *should* have felt. Even in our culture, women can become extremely stressed with the preparations involved in entertaining guests. How much more would this have been the case in their culture, where a woman’s entire identity and social value came from her domestic life?

The weight of expectations for Mary to fulfill her hostess duties would have been enormous. But she disregarded them. Instead, she sat at Jesus’ feet and listened to Him teaching. To Martha and probably many others, this was inexcusable. But for Mary it was worth it. She valued the opportunity to sit at Jesus’ feet so highly that any amount of derision paled by comparison.

Jesus knew Mary’s heart and affirmed her choice. Martha, a godly woman, took offense and brought the matter to Jesus’ attention, sincerely expecting Him to stand up for her and correct Mary. Instead, He stood up for Mary and corrected Martha.

The fear of not living up to the expectations of family members, friends, employers, or one’s culture can be overwhelming. This fear can make it seem impossible to find time for the one thing in life that matters most – sitting quietly at Jesus’ feet and being changed by His presence. Mary is a model for overcoming this fear. She had courage to accept the scorn and criticism that is often associated with choosing heaven’s priorities over man’s’.

Are you beginning seeing a pattern? Mary is driven to do something inadvisable and courageous because of her passionate love for Jesus. Other believers ridicule her. Then Jesus stands up for her and rebukes those who rebuked her. Now watch the pattern continue.

Pouring Out Her Love

Shortly before Jesus’ crucifixion, in the middle of a meal, with her family members and all the disciples present, Mary took a vial of perfume worth tens of thousands of dollars, broke it over Jesus’ head, anointed His feet, and wiped them with her hair (John 12, Mark 14, and Matthew

26). Again, imagine how vulnerable and embarrassing this would have been if Mary had been self-aware. To make matters worse, those present were indignant and scolded her, calling it a waste.

Perhaps Mary's family members thought she was being dramatic and wanted to be the center of attention. Perhaps the disciples thought she was being self-righteous and holier-than-thou. However, Jesus knew her heart and He defended her. He was so moved and honored by her expression of love that He promised it would be told to every generation afterward for all time. This must have made everyone else's criticism seem completely meaningless to Mary. She was only concerned about one Man's approval.

Someone who pursues Jesus with all her heart and passion, without regard for appearances or reputation, may be ridiculed by other Christians, friends, and family members. She may be called too extreme or unbalanced. There's nothing the world hates more than a Mary Magdalene and it is usually not difficult for this world's rulers to find Christians to agree with their accusations. However, those who pursue Jesus like Mary are willing to endure it because the joy of having Jesus' approval makes all the criticism seem meaningless by comparison.

The First Witness of the Resurrection

Finally, after Jesus was crucified, we once again see Mary's love conquering her fear. All of Jesus' disciples went into hiding for fear of the Jews (John 20:19). Mary Magdalene might easily have been subject to the same fear since she was known for having gone around from city to city with Jesus and the disciples (Luke 8:1-2) and was also known as Lazarus' sister, whom the Pharisees sought to kill after Jesus raised him from the dead (John 12:10). However, her desire to honor Jesus' body overruled any fear she might have felt. As a result, she has the honor of being the first witness of Jesus' resurrection (Mark 16:9, John 20:16).

Afterward, she was once again subject to ridicule and was once again defended by Jesus. When she jubilantly announced to the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead, they thought it was nonsense and refused to believe her (Mark 16:11, Luke 24:11). Shortly afterward, Jesus Himself appeared to them and reproached them for not believing her testimony (Mark 16:14).

Jesus actually *set Mary up* to be misunderstood and ridiculed. He commanded her to tell the disciples of His resurrection (John 20:17) knowing they might reject her testimony, but He wanted to test them to see if they would seek the Holy Spirit's perspective rather than trusting their own reasoning. Mary's encounter with Jesus was completely outside their paradigm for what was possible. They could not consider her testimony was true so they had no choice but to dismiss it as nonsense. Many people cannot accept a believer's testimony about their journey with the Lord if it doesn't fit into their worldview or their paradigm for how God works. This can often lead to ridicule. This is another kind of courage Mary modeled – the courage to share her testimony about God's activity in her life even though others might dismiss it or deride her for it.

Summary

There is no fear in love (1 John 4:18). Therefore, love inspires the greatest acts of courage. Mary's life is a picture of this courage. She was criticized (possibly) for her transparency and brokenness over her sins. She was criticized for violating cultural and family expectations so she could sit at Jesus' feet. She was criticized for expressing overt passion and generosity in her worship of Jesus. And she was criticized for sharing her experience of Jesus' resurrection. Every great thing she ever did was opposed and ridiculed by others, usually other believers, and every time Jesus affirmed and defended her. She refused to be ruled by fear because she was ruled by love.

She was like a prophet, except instead being persecuted for declaring God's judgments or future events, she was persecuted for her shameless love for Jesus. The blessing Jesus spoke of in the Sermon on the Mount certainly applies to her life:

"Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."
(Matthew 5:11-12)

The Bible identifies several factors that contribute to a believer's position in heaven and in the age to come. Examples include serving others (Matthew 26:26), suffering for the gospel (Hebrews 11:35), overcoming (Revelation 2:26-27), and faithful stewardship of resources and talents (ex. Luke 19:15-17). However, the single weightiest factor that determines a believer's position is the extent to which she fulfilled the first commandment, to love God with all her heart, mind, soul, and strength. By this metric, Mary Magdalene is among history's greatest saints, perhaps right alongside even Paul, John, or David. She is a shining example of godly femininity who, in many ways, also serves as an example to men.

Next

Much of what I share in this book, I learned during a period of restoration after nearly destroying my marriage. In the next chapter I will share some of my journey.

Chapter 21 – My Journey

In this chapter, I'd like to share a little about my own marriage, how it nearly ended, and how God restored it. Much of what I've written in this book, I learned while my marriage was being restored.

Opposites

As I discussed earlier, when Jenny and I got married, we were opposites in some ways. I had an intense zeal for the Lord, but I also had great weakness in the area of pride and selfish ambition. Jenny was less intense than I was and she had a natural humility, selflessness, and deep love for those close to her. We were also different in terms of our doctrines. We grew up with the same traditional evangelical background, but when I became a young adult I was exposed to a handful of charismatic ministries and assimilated some of their doctrines.

For the first few years of our marriage, I felt like the enemy was constantly whispering to me that Jenny would hold me back from my calling. This caused fear to rise up inside me because, as I said, Jenny was less intense than I was. I didn't know what my calling was. I only knew that fulfilling it was the most important thing in the world to me.

Whenever I brought this to the Lord, I felt as though He was saying I *needed* Jenny to fulfill my calling. She was an asset, not a liability. If I had known the extent of my pride and selfish ambition, perhaps this would have made more sense. But pride had a way of blinding me to my own condition. I didn't begin to understand how deeply I needed Jenny until after our marriage almost ended.

The Breakdown of My Marriage

My marriage broke down, in part, because I took one part of the biblical picture for how to make decisions as a couple and took it to the extreme – the part where the Lord may sometimes impress upon a wife to follow her husband's lead even if she hasn't felt the same specific direction for herself. I became deceived and driven to expect this with every decision. No room for discussion. No room for considering other options. Only – *"I am the head, God has spoken to me, and this is His will, so we have to obey."* Imagine how Jenny must have felt as she contemplated a lifetime of this kind of approach to major decisions.

This deception was intensified by idolatry. I made an idol out of my outside-the-home calling and it became more important to me than my marriage. If I had been willing to listen to my wife, God could have used her to protect me from this idolatry. But I didn't and it took ahold of me.

A Warning about Hearing God's Voice

Another factor that contributed to the near destruction of my marriage, and possibly my faith, was a serious deception in the area of “hearing God’s voice” that grew slowly but steadily over the course of about ten years. In this book I’ve shared a handful of times I felt the Lord put something on my heart either through an impression or a dream. However, I can say without exaggeration that for every example I could give of the Lord “speaking” to me in this way, I could give *dozens* of the enemy speaking to me. In some cases, I knew it was the enemy. In other cases, I initially thought it was the Lord and only realized later that it wasn’t. In other cases, I still don’t know and may never know. I could also give many examples of mistaking my own imagination for the Lord’s voice

By the end of those ten years, the vast majority of what I thought was God’s voice was actually the enemy. I was in great danger yet I sincerely believed I was in the center of God’s will and had sharp, clear discernment. There is nothing anyone could have said to open my eyes. Believe me, they all tried – wife, parents, in-laws, friends, and pastors. All they could do was pray, which they did with fervor. It is truly miraculous that my marriage and my faith are intact today.

Restoration Begins

After our marriage fell apart, Jenny and I agreed to stay with an older couple in another part of the country who walked us through a period of restoration. There I began to realize my heart was gripped by idolatry. I could not trust any guidance I thought I was hearing from the Lord. A door had been opened wide to the enemy and he had a right to be there. I felt like a dangerous risk. I felt blind and handicapped. I needed someone to lead me by the hand.

The wife of the older couple had something important to tell me. She was afraid to share it because she thought I would get angry, but fortunately I was able to hear it and it helped save my marriage. She challenged me to let Jenny act like the head of our marriage for six months and trust God to lead us through her. Whenever decisions came up that affected us both, I was free to share my thoughts and feelings, but the decision was ultimately hers. I felt strongly that this counsel was from the Lord and I was relieved to have clarity about how to move forward. We both agreed to this arrangement as we returned to our home. We also agreed to stay in regular phone contact with our mentors.

The next six months I learned so much from Jenny. Her approach to making decisions together was completely different from mine. I had always enjoyed the simplicity of asking the Lord for clear, specific instructions and then acting on what I thought He said. Every decision seemed black and white. Jenny, on the other hand, wanted to discuss our thoughts and feelings about the decision. She wanted to consider all the possible alternatives, compromises, and practical details. She wanted us both to feel good about whatever decision we made. I was not used to even *considering* how I felt about a major decision. *What difference do feelings make?* I thought. *Only obedience matters. God knows best.* The humility and gentleness of Jenny’s leadership style was an incredible example to me. She knew I felt vulnerable with her having

the final say and she wanted me to feel comfortable and safe.

Meanwhile, in my personal prayer times, I continued to hear the enemy's voice as clearly as I had ever heard the Lord's, and I knew it. Because I could not tell who was speaking to me, I gave up trying. It scared me having this evil presence in my life that was constantly pretending to be God and trying to speak to me. It scared me that I could become so deceived. I knew my character was not strong and I could be deceived again. I was vulnerable. I was in bondage. I needed help.

I regularly asked God for assurance that He would protect me. Although husbands are responsible to protect their wives, in response to this prayer God made it very clear that Jenny was also protecting me. Without her, I was easy prey to the enemy. I could feel how true this was.

There was a passage of scripture I felt especially drawn to during this season. I read it nearly every day for months. It is a handful of verses from Proverbs 4 that depict the wisdom of God personified as a woman. Since God frequently imparts wisdom into our lives through a spouse, the passage seemed appropriate and applicable when I thought about my wife:

“Do not forsake her, and she will guard you; love her and she will watch over you... Prize her, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a garland of grace; she will present you with a crown of beauty... Guard her, for she is your life.”

At the end of six months it was clear to me I was not ready to be the head of my marriage. I told Jenny and our mentors I wanted to continue our arrangement for another six months. They all agreed. I don't know if my marriage would have survived if I had not requested this extension.

The battle for my heart continued those next 6 months, but I steadily felt the grip of idolatry loosening as God opened my eyes to His perspective of my marriage. When the 2nd six months ended, neither I nor Jenny even mentioned it. But things felt safer. I had started to see our marriage as a partnership. I felt ready to be the head again. I felt like I knew how to make decisions together.

A few months later we faced our first major decision since our restoration and we did not see eye to eye. It felt scary and emotional for both of us after all we had been through. We agreed to pray about the decision both individually and together for a set period of time. We also agreed to talk intermittently with our mentors so they could help us through it.

The Lord made two things clear to me about this decision:

- 1) The process was more important to Him than the outcome. If we walked through the decision in a way that honored Him and each other, it would be a victory in His eyes, regardless of the outcome.

- 2) It was Jenny's decision. Even though I was the head again, if we didn't agree after the set amount of time was complete, He told me I should yield to her.

I could feel the enemy coming against me, trying to bring back old patterns. But the work God did in my heart had not been wasted. When we didn't ultimately agree and I yielded to Jenny, I could sense God's intense pleasure. I knew it had been a great victory in His eyes. Also, after some time passed it became clear that Jenny had been right about the decision and I was very glad I listened to her.

Black and White versus Relational Decision Making

As I said, my method for making every major decision was to seek direction from the Lord (at least I *thought* it was Him leading me) and obey. It was very black and white; not much room for feelings or preferences. This may sound deceived or unhealthy. In my case, it definitely was. However, it can also be deceived and unhealthy to assume every major decision is open to preferences and *not* subject to specific direction.

There are times when God relates to us as a friend (John 15:15), but there are also times He relates to us as a bond slave (1 Corinthians 7:22). There are times for exercising unquestioning obedience like a soldier (2 Timothy 2:4), and there are times to enjoy the liberty and freedom Christ bought for us (ex. 2 Corinthians 3:17, Galatians 5:1). I think this can change from one major decision to the next or from one season of our lives to the next. The key is to walk through the decision as a couple and be sensitive to how the Lord is relating to us.

Black and white thinkers like me appreciate the simplicity and clarity of being treated as a bond slave. We find it easier than others to sacrifice our personal preferences. We appreciate doctrines like *the fear of the Lord* and *dying to self*. We feel uncomfortable with the uncertainty that comes with freedom. We ask, *What if I miss out on God's best or choose the wrong path?* Black and white thinkers can also be very intense, lacking love, humility, and relational skills in how we lead others or make decisions.

Relational thinkers prefer decisions that are open to compromise and preference. They appreciate doctrines like God's fatherly approachability, His delight in us, and His sincere interest in our hopes and dreams. They find black and white thinking restrictive and oppressive. They are more easy-going and harmonious in how they lead others and make decisions. However, relational thinkers can sometimes lack discipline and surrender of will.

I think God sometimes brings black and white thinkers together with relational thinkers (in marriage, as well as other co-laboring contexts such as ministry leadership) because we complement each other. We refine and balance each other. Each of us has something the other needs. Each of us has an aspect of God's nature the other can learn from.

She is More Important

After my separation, I began praying that God would help me to see my marriage from His perspective. Prior to this, since I had always been a big-picture thinker, there was a part of me that honestly considered that having an impactful ministry might be more important than a strong marriage. I reasoned that a ministry could impact many people, but a spouse was only one person.

This flawed perspective began to change one day when God made it clear that Jenny was more important than me – not in a vague, sentimental way, but *strategically* more important. In terms of measurable fruit, my wife was called to make a greater impact than me. I felt the same would also be true of my children.

I don't know what Jenny's greater strategic importance means specifically; I don't know how He plans to use either of us in this lifetime or after He returns. But I strongly believe it is true. Therefore, the most important aspect of *my* calling is to help my wife and children fulfill *their* callings. Every time I walk through my front door, I am surrounded by people who are literally, measurably more important than me.

Now when I think about my calling, I think of it as two-fold: My *Inside-the-Home* calling and my *Outside-the-Home* calling. I am mindful that my *Inside-the-Home* calling is the more important part.

Next

In the next two chapters we will learn about the vital link between marriage and *eschatology*, which is essentially the study of events leading up to Jesus Christ's wedding.

Chapter 22 – Marriage and Eschatology

In almost every culture, the two most significant events in a man's life are his birth and his wedding day. Jesus' birth occurred at His first coming. Jesus' wedding will occur at His Second Coming. Therefore, at its heart, eschatology is the study of the events leading up to Jesus Christ's wedding. Since much of this book is about the parallels between marriage and Jesus's relationship to the church, and since many Christians believe we are close to Christ's return, eschatology felt like an important topic to include.

Competing Eschatological Views

While the next chapters are written from my own futurist/multiple-fulfillments perspective, I think you'll find many of the concepts they cover are potentially applicable to all eschatological positions. For those who are unfamiliar, here are some competing eschatological views:

- 1) *Futurists* believe many passages concerning the last days have yet to be fulfilled, including most of the book of Revelation, Matthew 24, and many Old Testament passages that seem to describe events such as the Battle of Armageddon, the Second Coming of Christ, and the Millennial Kingdom.
- 2) *Preterists* believe virtually all last days passages were fulfilled with the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD and/or the centuries that followed with the fall of the Roman Empire.
- 3) *Historicists* believe many last days prophecies were fulfilled throughout church history, particularly in the Middle Ages through the papacy and the Roman Catholic Church.
- 4) *Multiple Fulfillment Advocates* believe many last days prophecies have both legitimate past and future fulfillments because it is the nature of biblical prophecy to sometimes repeat or contain both spiritual and literal fulfillments.

Unsettled questions that contribute to differing interpretations of last days passages include:

- 1) Which events are literal and which are symbolic/spiritual?
- 2) Have documented historical events already sufficiently fulfilled the passage?
- 3) Will future events fulfill them "better" or more literally?
- 4) Could there be more than one fulfillment of some passages?

The Most Important Eschatological Passage in Scripture

Have you ever noticed that possibly the most important passage of scripture concerning marriage is also possibly the most important passage of scripture concerning eschatology? Look at what Ephesians 5:25-27 says:

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.”

Jesus “presenting the church to Himself” is a description of Jesus’ wedding day and of His second coming. A parallel passage can be found in Revelation 19:7-8:

“‘Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.’ It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.”

The fulfillment of these two passages is what all of creation has been waiting for ever since the fall!

Marriage in the Last Days

Have you ever considered that marriages in the body of Christ could become especially beautiful in the last days? I have. Here’s why:

- 1) The way we relate to others often mirrors our relationship to God. (1 John 1:7 & 4:20 are examples of this.) This is especially true of our closest and most important human relationship – our marriage.
- 2) Scripture teaches that a remnant of believers in the last days will hold fast to their faith, lead many to salvation, and literally lay down their lives for the gospel.
- 3) Since the relationship between Christ and His people in the last days will be purified in this way, this will likely be mirrored in Christian marriages.

In other words, perhaps the wedding between Jesus and His church will be foreshadowed in a special way through Christian marriages in the time leading up to His return. One Christian leader said this:

“...there is nothing more powerful on earth than family. It is the single most influential force for good (or evil) in human existence... This should come as no surprise because God created the family. At the very dawn of time, ‘God created man in His own image... male and female He created them.’ Of all the ways He could have chosen to inaugurate His creation, He chose to start with family. In fact, the Bible begins with a marriage in Genesis and ends with a marriage in Revelation. Marriage and family have always been central to what God is doing on planet earth.”

If this is true, that marriage and family are always central to what God is doing on planet earth, then what role will they play in the last days?

Revival or Apostasy?

Before continuing on the topic of marriage, I want to pause to address a question that may have arisen for some readers during the last section: Will the last days be marked by apostasy or revival? Will professing Christians fall away from the faith or will they grow strong and be purified?

Some ministries focus mostly on the darkness and deception of the end times, while others focus mostly on the steadfastness and holiness of the church. However, both are present in scripture and it would be imbalanced to only teach one.

Here are some passages about the darkness and apostasy:

- 1) Paul said there would be **“apostasy”** in 2 Thessalonians 2:3.
- 2) Paul said many **“will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons”** in 1 Timothy 4:1.
- 3) Jesus said in Matthew 24:12 that **“most people’s love will grow cold”**, referring to love for God, which nonbelievers do not have to begin with.
- 4) Isaiah 60:2, often applied to the last days, says **“darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples”**.
- 5) Revelation 13:12 says, **“the earth and those who dwell in it”** will **“worship”** a false, antichrist system.
- 6) Revelation 14:8 says this system will make **“all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality”**.

By contrast, here are some passages about revival and the faith and holiness of God’s people:

- 1) Daniel 11:32-33 says **“the people who know their God will display strength and take action. Those who have insight among the people will give understanding to the many...”**
- 2) In Matthew 13:24-43, Jesus describes a great harvest of wheat and tares. He explained, **“the harvest is the end of the age”**, the wheat is **“the sons of the kingdom”**, and the tares are **“the sons of the evil one”**. Then He gave the order: **“Allow both to grow together until the harvest”**. This implies a growing, or maturing, of both groups at the end of the age.

- 3) In Revelation 14:14-16, an angel said, **“Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe”**, then Jesus swept a sickle over the whole earth and reaped a great harvest, which symbolizes a harvest of souls. Since Jesus always works with and through His bride on the earth, it is reasonable to conclude the church will play a part in reaping this harvest. The same applies to the next two passages.
- 4) Another last days passage, Zephaniah 3:13-14, says, **“Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread, for the wine press is full. The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.”**
- 5) Revelation 7:9-14 describes **“a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues”** that successfully comes through the tribulation as followers of Jesus Christ.

It should come as no surprise that scripture portrays the end time church as mature and holy because historically the light of the church has always shined the brightest when darkness and deception were the greatest. As was seen in the early church or in the Dark Ages, whenever there has been heavy persecution of believers that forced them to choose between Christ and reputation, possessions, or their lives, those who stood firm were purified and became great lights.

Since believers will be heavily persecuted in the last days, even unto death (ex. Matthew 24:9, Revelation 6:11, 12:11, 13:7-10), it is to be expected that those who hold fast will grow in faith and holiness as a result. This could even apply regardless of one’s view on the timing of the rapture because gradually increasing birth pangs could have a similar sifting effect. It could also apply from the perspective of preterists or historicists since there is no reason times of darkness and persecution could not happen again. Even today as moral pollution increases in the west, many are falling away from the faith, but others are growing stronger and becoming bright lights.

Marriage As God Intended

We discussed previously how the potential for husband-wife partnerships to impact the world was handicapped shortly after the fall when Satan introduced polygamy, which endured throughout the Old Testament. In the church age, monogamy has been restored, but until just recently women have still been mostly disallowed from expressing their ministry gifts due to cultural norms.

Pastors who say women must not be permitted to teach or exercise any authority in the church base the entire position on one verse (1 Timothy 2:12) in which the word often translated **“man”** should probably be translated **“husband”** in light of the immediate context, as well as

the full testimony of scripture. Examples of women ministering or exercising authority in scripture include:

- Aaron's sister Miriam (Ex 15:20)
- Huldah (2 Kings 22:14)
- Anna (Luke 2:36)
- Paul permitted women to prophesy (1 Corinthians 11:5)
- The four daughters of Philip were called prophetesses (Acts 21:9)
- Debra was a political and military leader in Israel (Judges 4)
- Phoebe was a deacon (Romans 16:1)
- Junia was an apostle (Romans 16:7)

Today it is becoming common for women to teach, preach, write, and hold various other positions of influence in the body of Christ. Possibly for the first time since the fall, the co-laboring partnership God created husbands and wives to function in together is no longer hindered by unbiblical traditions. This is an exciting moment in history. There is incredible power when husbands and wives labor together in unity.

We see in the church today examples of women freely expressing their ministry gifts and, in some cases, having a more visible impact than their spouse. Beside them, we see proud husbands lifting them up, supporting them, and encouraging them. What an incredible picture of Jesus and the church. Jesus laid a foundation for His bride to build upon and, in one sense, have an even greater impact than Him. This is why He said it is to our advantage that He went away and that we will do greater works than Him (John 16:7, John 14:12). This did not mean that anyone besides Jesus would ever be sinless or the Savior, but that God's purposes would be more effectively advanced through the empowerment of His bride rather than Jesus exercising all authority unilaterally.

Although men are generally more accomplishment-oriented, women, in one sense, are uniquely equipped for stewarding authority since they are naturally more relational and relationship is the highest value of God's kingdom. Plus, women are **"weaker"** (1 Peter 3:7) and God's **"power is perfected in weakness"** (2 Corinthians 12:9). However, women were also created to be covered, served, and empowered by their husbands in order to realize their full potential. This ingredient has been mostly missing from many generations throughout history. Perhaps it will be on special display in the days prior to Christ's return.

Heralds of the Second Coming

God chose women as the first witnesses to herald Jesus' resurrection (Luke 24:9-10). Similarly, Psalms 68 suggests women will also be among the preeminent voices declaring His return. The passage contains several elements related to the second coming – Jesus riding through the wilderness leading heavenly armies; a great earthquake; all the wicked melting like wax and perishing; Jesus taking His throne in Israel forever (vs. 1-3, 7-8, 16-17). All of this imagery parallels passages in Revelation and other parts of scripture that describe the Battle of

Armageddon and the second coming. But notice what it says in verse 11. Who does it say will proclaim the good news of the second coming? Who does it say will replace the wicked kings of the earth in their positions of authority? **“The women who proclaim the good tidings are a great host; kings of armies flee, they flee, and she who remains at home will divide the spoil!”** Women, wives, and faithful mothers will be at the forefront of proclaiming Christ’s return and among those given authority in His coming kingdom.

The Proverbs 31 Woman

We discussed earlier how stewarding authority has to do with wisdom and there seems to be a special connection in the Bible between women and wisdom. It was the desire for wisdom, pursued in a forbidden way, which caused Eve to disobey. And in the book of Proverbs, a book all about wisdom, wisdom is personified as a woman (chapters 3-4, 8-9) and it famously culminates with a woman in Chapter 31.

However, what is not commonly recognized about Proverbs 31 is that its last verse speaks specifically about the last days. It states:

“Give her the product of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.”

Notice the key elements:

- 1) The **“product of her hands”** refers to garments she made (vs. 13), which represent her righteous works.
- 2) Her **“works”** praising her in the gates represent eternal rewards.
- 3) The **“gates”** represent the gates of the enemy, which are immediately converted into gates of Christ’s kingdom upon His return.

The only other time in the Bible where a woman is rewarded in the gates with garments symbolizing righteous works is at the second coming of Christ in Revelation 19:7-8:

“...for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.’ It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.”

In context, this passage takes place immediately before the Battle of Armageddon, when the **“gates”** of the enemy are overwhelmed. God described this moment to Abraham in Genesis 22:17, saying, **“Your seed shall possess the gates of their enemies”**, and Jesus foretold it to Peter in Matthew 16:18, saying, **“The gates of Hades will not overpower [the church].”** When Jesus Christ condemns Satan to hell and takes His place in Jerusalem as the King of Kings over the earth, the enemy’s gates will essentially be converted into heaven’s gates, and the saints will receive their eternal rewards.

I realize the Proverbs 31 “gates” also refer to historical city entry points where elders sat and conferred honor upon worthy recipients. However, for me, the five-point parallel between Proverbs 31:31 and Revelation 19:7-8 is enough evidence to infer a valid last days application.

The Last Eve

If Jesus is the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:21), this makes the church the last Eve. Just as the last Adam overcame where the first Adam fell, the last Eve will overcome where the first Eve fell.

The first Eve did not abide under her husband’s covering. She did not trust God’s word. She obeyed Satan’s suggestion. The last Eve, the church, will do the opposite – reject Satan’s suggestions, abide under her husband’s covering, and trust God’s word.

The first Eve was deceived into pursuing good things in a forbidden way – wisdom, opened eyes, discernment of good and evil, and to be like God. The last Eve will desire these things as well, but she will trust God to fulfill them.

Of course this has applied to saints throughout church history, but perhaps this victory will be uniquely reflected through godly wives in the last days. Perhaps some of the most beautiful wisdom and discernment will come through women.

Next

In the next chapter we will discuss the relationship in scripture between marriage and overcoming the fear of death.

Chapter 23 – Men in the Last Days

What role are men and husbands called to fill in the last days? The answer to this question may be uncomfortable, but scripture has so much to say about it, it would simply be foolish to ignore it. Men are uniquely qualified to impart courage for helping the church overcome the fear of death, just as Jesus did for His bride through His example at cavalry.

Love Grown Cold

Matthew 24:12-13 says, **“Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.”** In context, **“people’s love”** refers to their love for God and **“lawlessness”** refers to the breakdown of society with hatred and blame directed at Christians. The reason **“most people’s love will grow cold”** is because they will take offense at God, blame Him for all the nightmarish things taking place, and fall away rather than enduring **“to the end”**.

Some assume **“lawlessness”** refers to licentious. They interpret the passage to mean it will become increasingly difficult to overcome various temptations such as lust, greed, or pride. While that will certainly be true of the last days (ex. 1 Timothy 3:1-5), this particular passage is clearly talking about the breakdown of society. Look at what Jesus said in the verses immediately prior:

“For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes... Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another.”

Clearly the context is deadly violence against Christians.

Notice also that Matthew 24:7-13 seems to closely parallel Revelation 6. There are so many common elements – widespread war, famine, poverty, violence, and death. And all of it set up in such a way that Christians are universally blamed for causing it and/or opposing the remedy for it, which is why both passages culminate with Christians being martyred en masse. This is why Jesus said Christians will **“be hated by all nations because of My name”**.

When Courage is Needed, Men Arise

During periods of great spiritual darkness, spiritual/eternal safety and physical/political safety become polar opposites and Christians are forced to choose between them. At such times, Jesus’ words from Luke 9:24 become ultra-literal:

“For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.”

Since men, in general, reflect the warrior / protector side of God's nature they can impart strength to endure terrifying persecution. They are equipped not to panic in the face of death or imprisonment, but to remind those in their care that such nightmares last only a moment while safety, peace, and security in Christ last forever.

Let's go back for a moment to Abraham and Sarah's story. Do you remember how Abraham twice lied about Sarah being his sister to save his life? It's easy to criticize Abraham, but put yourself in his shoes. From what is known about this region and time period, these were probably wicked cultures that practiced demon worship and human sacrifice. To kill Abraham and take Sarah by force would have been mere routine. Viewing his situation from a temporal perspective, his options were either live and lose Sarah or die and lose Sarah. Therefore, his decision may have seemed logical. However, if he had viewed his situation from an eternal perspective, he would have sought the Lord for protection, hearted himself and Sarah to prepare for the possibility of death, and emboldened Sarah to defy the king's advances should she be taken away from him.

A fairly similar choice (forcible separation from loved ones followed by imprisonment and/or death) has been faced by Christians throughout history every time faith in Christ became criminalized. And it will almost certainly be faced by many more in the future. Husbands, are we prepared to do better than Abraham?

When Solomon saw how horribly people were oppressed in his day, he concluded it was better to be dead than alive, and better still to never have been born (Ecclesiastes 4:1-3). If that was true of his day, how much more will this feel true of the last days, of which Jesus said:

"For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will" (Mark 13:19)?

However, Ecclesiastes repeated the phrase **"under the sun"** over and over because many of Solomon's observations only hold true when life is viewed from a temporal perspective. If we face events in our lifetimes that cause us to feel as Solomon did – that it is better to be dead or never to have been born – we should remember how Paul viewed his suffering:

"For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." (2 Corinthians 4:17)

How the Church Overcomes Satan

It is thoroughly supported by scripture that laying down our lives unto death for the sake of the gospel is precisely *how* the saints overcome Satan in the last days. For example, Revelation 12:11 says:

“And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.”

In Revelation 6:11, John even speaks as though there is some sort of martyrdom quota through which Satan will be defeated:

“And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, *would be completed also.*”

This concept resonates with what Paul wrote in Colossians 1:24, saying:

“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in *filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.*”

In the same way that faith and prayer invite God’s intervention, perseverance in the midst of persecution does the same thing. This will apparently be a major part of how Satan is ultimately conquered.

Speaking of conquering Satan, how many times have you heard it said we are **“more than conquerors”** in Christ, quoting Romans 8:37? Or how many times have you heard it said **“nothing can separate us from the love of God”**, quoting Romans 8:38? Did you ever look at the context of those verses? *How* do we become conquerors? *When* do we most need to remember nothing can separate us from God’s love? Look at the passage again when we include the previous two verses:

“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, ‘For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Called For This Purpose

When the apostle Peter addressed the topic of unjust suffering, he taught that Christians are called *for that very purpose*, just as Christ was (1 Peter 2:21-23):

“For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.”

Jesus effectively said the same thing in John 20:21, saying:

“Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”

Have you ever noticed the incredible irony of this statement? The disciples had just witnessed Jesus being killed. Now they were locked in a room for fear of being killed themselves. They were anything but peaceful. Then Jesus appeared out of thin air, said **“peace be with you”**, and told them to go do the very thing that just got *Him* killed and would inevitably get *them* killed! Every single one of them was martyred, with the exception of John, according to *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*. Furthermore, they all had wives who partnered with them in ministry (1 Corinthians 9:5) and could possibly have been martyred with them.

Blaspheming the Holy Spirit

Over the years, people have speculated what it means to **“blaspheme the Holy Spirit”**, which Jesus said was the unforgivable sin. However, in context it clearly means denying the name of Jesus Christ when confessing Him will mean death. Luke 12:4-10 says:

“I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him! ...And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will confess him also before the angels of God; but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him.”

There have been historical exceptions to this principle. For example, the apostle Peter denied Christ when he feared for his life and was able to repent. And it is likely, with tens of millions of martyrs through the centuries, there were also others who initially denied Christ to save their physical lives, but later repented and were saved. However, scripture is clear that this will not be a possibility with the mark of the beast. Nor should it be depended upon prior to the mark of the beast since there is no guarantee one will have opportunity or ability to repent at later time. Scripture repeatedly warns against the eternal danger posed by cowardice in the face of death or persecution (ex. Hebrews 10:36-38, Revelation 2:10, 21:8, Matthew 10:28-32)

Is America Immune?

As I said before, such warnings could even apply regardless of your view on the timing of the rapture due to gradually increasing birth pangs. And they could likewise apply from the perspective of preterists. Similar trials were certainly experienced by millions of first through third century Christians, Dark Ages Christians, and even modern day Christians. Christians in closed countries are regularly imprisoned or executed for peacefully practicing their faith. The

west is moving rapidly in that direction as well. In some European countries it is considered “hate speech” to refer to your spouse as *husband* or *wife*. Instead they use the term *partner* because it is less gender-specific.

Could the popular theology that God would never allow American Christians to suffer heavy, broad scale persecution be a lie designed to lull us into a false sense of security? Could the enemy be setting us up to become shocked and offended at God if we ever experience the same things here that Christians have experienced for thousands of years?

Could this theology be contributing to the lack of male engagement in the church, teaching that days ahead will not be a battle that requires courage, but a harmless whisking away to safety? Would not such a teaching have been considered dangerously false to previous generations who laid down their lives by the millions?

When facing the topic of persecution, some people reply simply, “*God is in control*”. However, what they really mean, in some cases, is, “*God would never allow anything truly horrible to happen to me*”. This thinking could be a grave deception. Yes, God is in control of the ultimate outcome of history. And, depending on where you fall on the spectrum between Calvinism (emphasized God’s sovereignty) and Arminianism (emphasizes man’s free will), He has some degree of control over our individual lives and nations. However, consider the following questions:

- Was God in control in Israel when it was invaded, the men killed, the women taken, and the children dashed against rocks on more than one occasion?
- Was He in control in Rome when Christians were crucified and fed to lions?
- Was He in control in Europe in the Middle Ages when Christians were slain by the sword and burned at the stake by the millions?
- Was He in control in Germany when Hitler deceived the majority of German pastors and congregants into believing he was sent by God to restore their crumbling nation, but later starved to death or were burned alive in firestorm bombing campaigns?
- Has He been in control in America these last several decades over which we have become arguably the greatest exporter of moral pollution in world history?

However you answer these questions, one thing is for sure: If horrific things could happen to believers in past generations, they could happen to us as well. We are not immune.

A Dream

Once I had a dream in which I was walking across a cracked, desolate landscape. The sky was red. In the distance was a large, black, molten statue that represented an antichrist system.

There were hate-filled, demonized men and women all around me, watching to see whether I would bow down and worship the statue. The scene felt extremely dark and oppressive.

When I arrived at the base of the statue, I knew what was at stake. If I worshipped it, I would be lost forever. If I didn't worship it, I would be killed. I felt such intense pressure to fall down and worship it. Then I had a thought:

"If it's this hard to not worship it even though I know what the stakes are and I've prepared myself for martyrdom, what will it be like for those who aren't sure about the stakes? What will it be like for those who think God will understand if they bow down to save their lives? What will it be like for those taken off guard because they thought God would never allow a situation like this to happen to them?"

Then I woke up. I felt the message of the dream was this: The prospect of martyrdom will always be difficult, but it will be much more bearable for those who are prepared and have determined beforehand to stand firm.

Conclusion

Throughout history, men have been the first to lay down their lives. It may have been to protect their families or their nation. It may have been to save anonymous strangers by remaining aboard a sinking ship or rushing into a burning building. Even today women and children are given preference in survival situations.

When death is imminent, godly men remain calm and provide comfort. They impart courage to their wives, children, and others by modeling an attitude of hope and faith. This is a picture of Jesus and His bride. He set an example for us by laying down His life **"for the joy set before Him"** (Hebrews 12:2).

It has always been God's desire for Jesus' bride to follow His example in all things. For some saints, this includes martyrdom. John 20:21 says that just as the Father sent Jesus, so has Jesus sent us. 1 John 2:6 says that believers are called to walk just as Jesus walked. Peter said Christ suffered for us, leaving an example for us to follow (1 Peter 2:21-23).

By the end of this age, Jesus and His bride will have this in common: They both will have ushered in a new age on earth by laying down their lives. Jesus' suffering and death were labor pangs leading up to birth of the Church Age (see John 16:20-22), which was the initial manifestation of God's kingdom on the earth. Likewise, the church's "death" (crescendo of tribulation and martyrdom at the end of the age) are labor pangs leading up to the birth of the Kingdom Age (see Mathew 24:8, Romans 8:22), which is the next manifestation of God's kingdom on earth.

Just as Jesus' death was followed shortly after by His resurrection and exaltation to a place of authority, so also will His bride's death be followed shortly after by her resurrection and exaltation to a place of authority at her Husband's side, as we see in Revelation 20:4:

"Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."

Perhaps the most powerful stronghold Satan has over mankind is the fear of death. However, Jesus conquered this stronghold through the cross, as we see in Hebrews 2:14b-15:

"...that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives."

Do we see evidence that this stronghold in the human heart has really been conquered? Do we see evidence of it in church history? Will we see evidence of it in the future? Yes. According to scripture, by loving God more than their own lives, end-times saints will once again demonstrate that the cross really has rendered **"powerless"** the **"fear of death"**.

Men and husbands impart courage for overcoming the fear of death. Women and wives impart relational love for God like that of a new bride for her husband. Put them together and you have a love that overcomes death, a love that cannot be quenched even though it is opposed by the **"many waters"** of mass humanity (Revelation 17:15) and all the powers of hell. This is confirmed by our final last-days passage, which, fittingly, is set in the midst of a wedding:

"For love is as strong as death, jealousy is as severe as Sheol; ...many waters cannot quench love." (Song of Solomon 8:6-7)



“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

John 3:16

If you know the Lord, will you please spend 15-30 seconds right now to pray for the spiritual and physical health and safety of my family and me? Thank you.